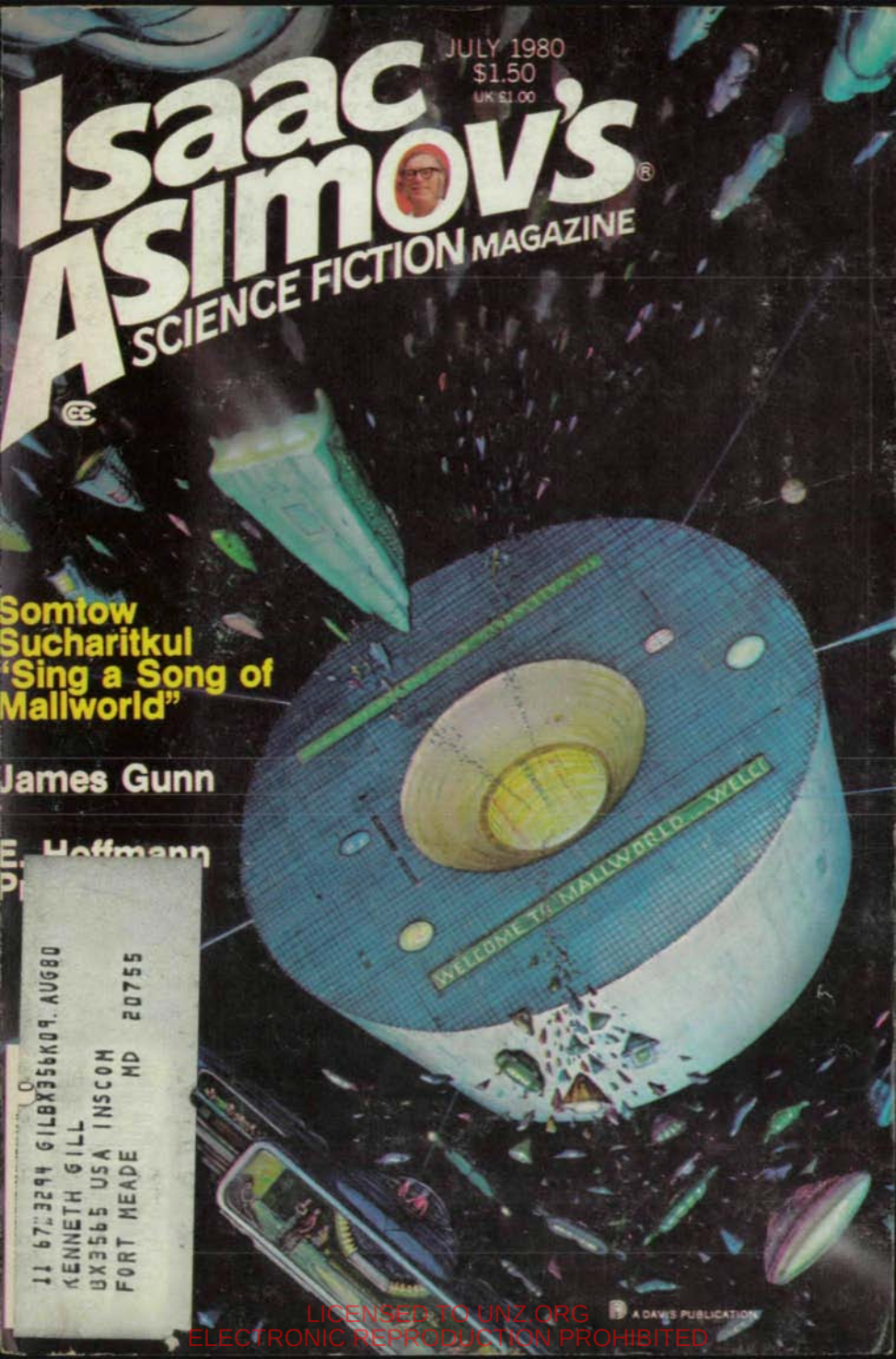

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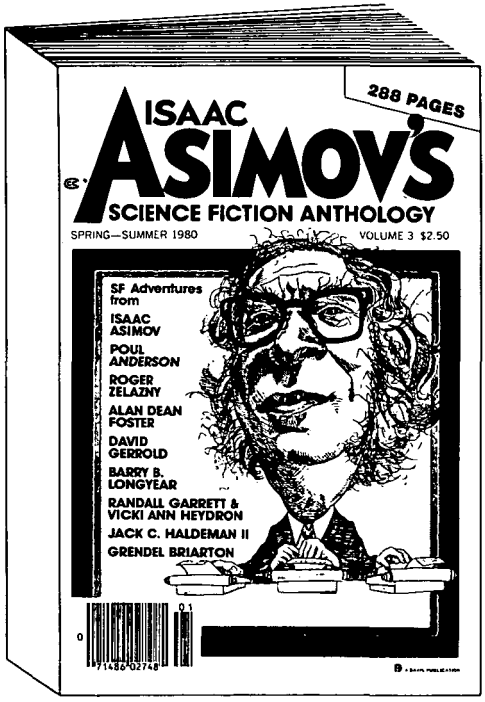

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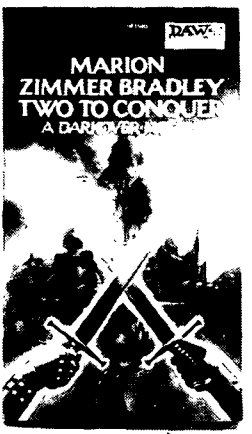

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EDITORIAL: SERIALS

by Isaac Asimov

art: Frank Kelly Freas

When is a writer not a writer?

When he is asked to write outside his specialty.

Writing is not a unitary matter. A person who is a skilled science writer, or who can turn out fascinating popular histories, may be hopeless when it comes to writing fiction. The reverse is also true.

Even a person like myself who is adept at both fiction and non-fiction and ranges over considerable variety in both subdivisions is not a universal writer. I can't and won't write plays, whether for the theater, motion pictures, or television. I don't have the talent for it.

It is surprising, in fact, how thinly talent can be subdivided. The functions, advantages, and disadvantages of fiction differ so with subject matter that every writer is more at home in one kind of fiction than in another. I can do science fiction and mysteries, but I would be madly misjudging myself if I tried to do "mainstream" fiction or even "new-wave" science fiction.

Oddly enough, even length counts. You might think that if someone is writing a story, it can be any length. If it finishes itself quickly, it is a short story; if it goes on for a long time, it is a novel; if it is something in between, it is a novelette or a novella.

That's just not so. Length is not the sole difference. A novel is not a lengthy short story. A short story is not a brief novel. They are two different species of writing.

A novel has space in which to develop a plot leisurely, with ample room for sub-plots, for detailed background, for description, for character development, for comic relief.

A short story must make its point directly and without side issues. Every sentence must contribute directly to the plot-development.

A novel is a plane; a short story is a line.

A novel which is too short and thus abbreviates the richness of its development would be perceived by the reader as skimpy and therefore unsatisfactory. A short story which is too long and allows

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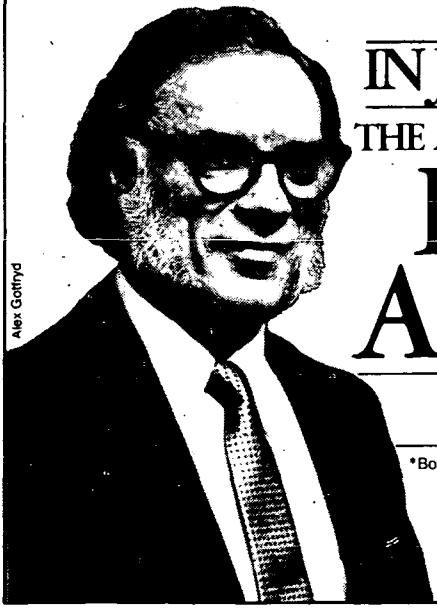

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*Bob Mecoy, *Future Life*, on *In Memory Yet Green*

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the reader's attention to wander from the plot is diffuse and therefore unsatisfactory.

There are writers who are at home with the broad swing of the novel and are not comfortable within the confinement of the short story. There are writers who are clever at driving home points in short stories and who are lost in the echoing chambers of the novel. And of course there are writers who can do both.

A magazine such as ours is primarily a vehicle in which the short story is displayed. It is important we fulfill this function for a variety of reasons:

1) Short stories are worth doing and worth reading. They can make concise points that novels cannot, in ways that novels cannot.

2) A group of short stories which, in length, take up the room of one novel, offer far more variety than a novel can; and there is something very pleasant about variety.

3) Those writers who are adept at the short story need a vehicle.

4) Beginning writers need a vehicle, too; and beginners are well-advised to concentrate on short stories at the start. Even if their true skill turns out to be in the novel, initial training had better be in the short story, which requires a smaller investment in time and effort. A dozen short stories will take no more time than a novel and offer much more scope for experimentation and "finding one's self."

When George, Joel, and I began this magazine, we were aware of all these points and were determined to make it a magazine devoted to the short story exclusively. And we are still so determined.

Yet it is not easy to be rigid. It is perhaps not even desirable to be rigid under all circumstances. There are times when the best of rules ought to be bent a little.

What are the forces, for instance, that drag us in the direction of length?

To begin with, there are (rightly or wrongly) more literary honors and monetary rewards for novels than for short stories, so that if a writer can handle any length, he usually finds himself gravitating toward the novel.

Naturally, since a novel requires a great investment of time and effort, it is the experienced writers of tried quality who are most likely to move in that direction. And once they've done that, they're not likely to want to let go. It becomes difficult, in fact, to persuade them to take time out from their current novel in order to write a short story.

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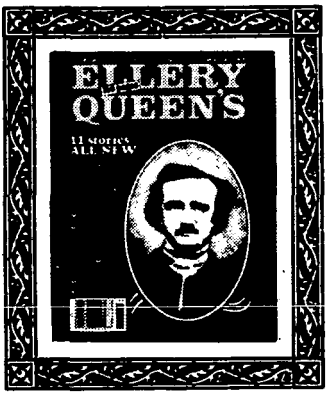

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As long as we stick rigidly to short stories, therefore, we tend to lose the chance at picking up the work of some of the best practitioners in the field. Newcomers, however worthy, tend to have lesser experience and their writing tends to be less polished.

For the most part, this does not dismay us. We *want* the newcomers, and the freshness of concept and approach is quite likely to make up for what clumsiness of technique is brought about through inexperience. The clumsiness, after all, will smooth out with time—and at that point, the new talent will almost inevitably begin to write novels.

Occasionally, then, we bend. If a story comes along by an established writer that is unusually good but is rather long, we are tempted to run it. We have indeed run stories as long as 40,000 words in a single issue.

There are advantages to this. If you like the story, you can get deeply immersed in it and savor the qualities that length makes possible and that you can't get otherwise. And there are disadvantages. If you don't like the story and quit reading it, you have only half a magazine left and you may feel cheated.

George must judge the risk and decide when a long story is likely to be so generally approved of that the advantage will far outweigh the disadvantage.

But what do we do about novels? Ignore them?

Most novelists do not object to making extra money by allowing a magazine to publish part or all of the novel prior to its publication *as* a novel. And most magazines welcome the chance of running a novel in installments.

Consider the advantages to the magazine. If the first part of a serial is exciting, well-written and grabs the reader, it is to be expected that a great many readers will then haunt the newsstands waiting for the next issue. If many serials prove to have this grabbing quality, readers will subscribe rather than take the chance of missing installments.

Magazine publishers do not object to this. Even Joel wouldn't.

There are, however, disadvantages. Some readers actively dislike novels. Others may like novels but bitterly resent being stopped short and asked to wait a month for a continuation, and may also resent having to run the risk of missing installments.

We are aware of these disadvantages and also of our own responsibility for encouraging the short story, so we have sought a middle ground.

These days there are so many novels and so few magazines that

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there isn't room to serialize them all. Many good novels are therefore available for the prior publication of only a chunk of themselves—some chunk that stands by itself. We have been deliberately keeping our eyes open for these.

It's not always easy to find a novel-chunk that stands by itself. The fact that something goes afterward, or comes before, or both is likely to give the reader a vague feeling of incompleteness. Sometimes, then, we try to run several chunks, each of which stands by itself, or almost does. This come close to serialization, but if the second piece can be read comfortably without reference to the first, then it's not. Again, George must use his judgement in such cases.

But then, every once in a long while, we are trapped by our own admiration of a novel and find ourselves with a chunk we would desperately like to publish, but that is too long to fit into a single issue and that can't conveniently be divided into two independent chunks.

—Then, with a deep breath, if we can think of no way out, we serialize. We hate to do this, and we hardly ever will. But hardly ever isn't never!

When there's no other way out, rather than lose out on something really first-class, we will have to ask you to wait a month.

But hardly ever.

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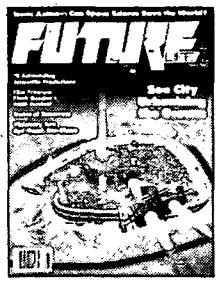

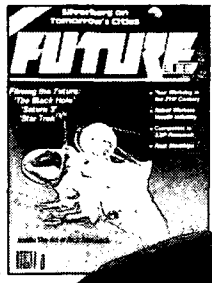

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ON BOOKS
by Baird Searles

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Lord Valentine's Castle by Robert Silverberg, Harper & Row, $12.50.
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Isaac Asimov's Adventures of Science Fiction edited by George H. Scithers, The Dial Press, $9.95.

Ares Magazine, Simulations Publications, Inc., 257 Park Ave. South, New York NY 10010, $6.00 for 6 issues (one year), $3.00 for a single copy. (Reviewed by John M. Ford.)

This month has been a rather special one, one of heroes and horrors, some really big names—Silverberg, Niven, Bester (is SF finally stuck with a star system that's nonastronomical?)—and an unknown find, some of the best reading I've had all year and some of the worst. So let the bouquets and brickbats fall where they may. (Answer to above question—some of the stars' advances are pretty astronomical.)

First, a whoop of pure joy for Robert Silverberg's *Lord Valentine's Castle*—was it propitious that I began reading it on February 14th? Silverberg has been a major name as writer and editor for some time now. His batting average as editor is brilliant, but I've always had great reservations about his writing. Craft and intellect have

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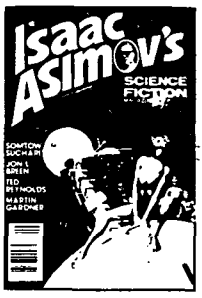

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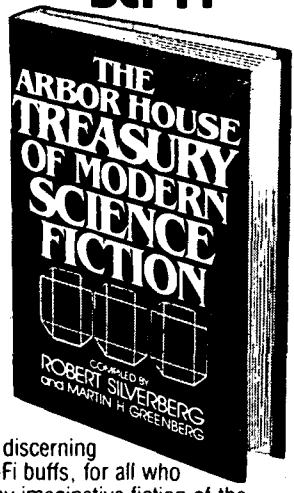

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always been there, but something else has been missing for me—a lightness, a likability; it's very hard to pin down. Even the phantasmagorical *Son of Man* seemed heavy and rather plodding (with that title and a protagonist called Clay, you're getting significance whether it's there or not).

Recently I addressed a high-school science fiction class with a general theme of the ten best SF movies ever. Now these were some bright kids, and they all were horrified that I included *Star Wars*. Though it was obvious that they had enjoyed it immensely, their major objection to it was that it didn't *mean* anything. And they found it very hard to comprehend my point that something didn't *have* to mean anything to be wonderful. Is the next generation to be nothing but symbol-conscious pedants?

If so, the next generation is going to hate *Lord Valentine's Castle*—not to mention Balanchine's *The Four Temperaments*, the Ravel String Quartet, and the paintings of Jackson Pollack, none of which *mean* anything *per se*. I'm not suggesting that *Valentine's* is exactly on that level of genius, but it *is* a rousing story told by a master storyteller and certainly deserves to become a classic in its own field.

What "its own field" is, however, could be a matter of strong debate. The novel has a very clear science-fictional base, taking place as it does on an immensely large planet, Majipoor. This means, for one thing, a planet-wide lack of metals, and as a corollary, a gravity not commensurate with its size, at least relative to Earth's; for another, immense distances and areas, even with much of the surface taken up by huge oceans.

Majipoor, it is established, was settled by humans many thousands of years ago, who eventually subdued and to a great extent replaced the native race, the metamorphs. There is still a sizable remnant of the indigenes left, though, even with the staggering billions of the human population, since there are great areas of Majipoor still "undeveloped."

The wonderful thing Silverberg has done here is that in this well-defined, rational background he has wrought a plot and specific settings that smack much more of fantasy than of SF. What that difference is I would be hard put to define in a few paragraphs here, so I won't try. I will say that I thought of Jack Vance in the variety and color of the various milieux that Silverberg thrusts his hero through; the immensity of Majipoor is filled with the strange and wonderful. But Vance is seldom epic, and *Lord Valentine's Castle* is epic indeed, with one of those ultimately satisfying plots of the

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vagabond loser who with pluck and luck rises to the farthest heights.

Certainly one thing that says fantasy to me rather than science fiction is the utter simplicity of the plot. We're with Valentine all the way; though told in the third person, there are no alternative viewpoints, no breaking away to reveal what's happening elsewhere. We travel with Valentine through the myriad odd hamlets encountered by the theatrical troupe of which he is a part, and through the halls and palaces of the powers of this world, whom he must conquer or convince that he is its rightful ruler.

Those powers-that-be of Majipoor deserve a mention of their own; they are also strange and wonderful. There is the Coronal, the visible head of state, who is also named Valentine; the Pontifex, usually an ex-Coronal, who heads the planetary bureaucracy from a mysterious underground labyrinth; the Lady of the Isle of Sleep, the mother of the Coronal, who sends dreams to the billions of Majipoorans; and the King of Dreams, who sends dreams of another sort. I won't even try to describe Lord Valentine's Castle itself; it is a concept so stupendous it really defies description.

A couple of months ago, I said something about the juggling act Joan Vinge did with *The Snow Queen*. There's a great deal of juggling in *Lord Valentine's Castle* (and being Silverberg, he doesn't just say that somebody juggles—the reader gets a course in it) and I can't resist using the metaphor again. Keeping both the giant world of Majipoor and the book's outrageously wonderful plot spinning for 459 pages is quite a feat.

Larry Niven has also never been a favorite of mine. His concepts are always intriguing; but I've had doubts about the writing of them, which is one of the reasons I've never gotten around to reading the Gil Hamilton stories. But I felt duty-bound to tackle the new one (it was shorter than *The Ringworld Engineers*), and I'm very glad I did.

The title is *The Patchwork Girl* and, like the other Gil Hamilton stories, it is something of a mystery thriller. In this case, the mystery is: who tried to kill a Belter delegate to a Conference to Review Lunar Law being held at Hovestraydt City on the Moon? It's neatly and smoothly written, with that special attention paid to the gritty little details of life in an alien environment which I think of as Heinleinesque. And some of those little details are also clues to the solution. More than that I cannot say.

I also liked Niven's little inside jokes, some stated obviously, some less so. There's a reference to the "flying mountains" of the Asteroid

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Belt, as well as the D'Alembert Mountains of the Moon. Several times he compares the exaggeratedly tall Lunies to Tolkien elves. I was a little taken aback when the Patchwork Girl of the title (an Oz reference, of course) turned out to be named Naomi Mitchison, which is also the name of a brilliant British author of extraordinarily good historical novels and some equally good SF and fantasy.

But in fact my only real quibble with this book has nothing to do with Niven at all. It is that it is another of those over-illustrated, oversized "trade" paperbacks, costing $5.95 for a comparatively short novel. And I personally feel that the extra size and the illustrations (by Fernando—good, but not *that* good) don't justify the difference in price over a standard paperback, no matter how well done the literary matter is.

Our non-star of the month is Linda Haldeman, but judging by her *The Lastborn of Elvinwood,* that's a stuation that may not last. (That's all we need is another Haldeman in addition to Joe and Jack.) But before we get to the book, a brief digression. . . .

I have on my wall a reproduction of an extraordinary painting from the Tate Gallery in London. It is called "The Fairy Feller's Master Stroke" and is by a Victorian painter named Richard Dadd. It portrays, in incredibly fine detail, a motley crowd of fairies, several dozen at least, dressed in curious garb and conveying a strong sense of evil—or perhaps just an unpleasantness, and not only because several of them are malformed. Their miniature scale is established by the plants they stand among, and they are watching one of their fellows wielding a stone axe, about to split what seems to be a chestnut.

Now I've always wanted the story behind this peculiarly powerful and finely wrought painting; I've never known whether the artist gave one or not (he was a patricide, ironically enough considering his name, and spent much of his life in an asylum). But about three quarters of the way through *The Lastborn of Elvinwood,* a bell began to ring and I suddenly realized that Ms. Haldeman had set up as a major scene that of the painting I knew so well. There are some discrepancies between word and picture, but if it's a coincidence, it's a pretty incredible one. (Be it clear that I'm not accusing the author of unoriginality, but am enormously grateful that, witting or not, she has given me a story for my image.)

Even aside from that odd aspect of the novel, I think it's a real find. The premise is a simple one—the fairy band of Elvinwood, in Surrey, are at this point a pretty woebegone lot. To save the race,

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to—bluntly—get some new breeding stock, they decide to effect a changeling switch. To do this, they enlist the aid, willing or unwilling, of four humans of the nearby village; and since everyone, including the scholarly vicar, has forgotten the spells and rituals involved, the vicar must ask the aid of Merlin, who is living in a small village in Cornwall. (If you're thinking of Susan Cooper's Uncle Merry, forget it—this Merlin is a far cry from that kindly gent.)

Things get really complicated because there has been a cordial dislike between the fairies and Merlin for centuries, and the humans find themselves in the middle. The results of all this range from the horrendous to the tragic to the funny, and I found myself thinking I'd not read anyone who came closer to T. H. White with a mixture of the realistically mundane and the fantastic. Haldeman's Merlin, as I implied, has a vicious streak; on the other hand, one of the funniest things I've read in a long time is a brief, almost thrown away account of his problems with Arthur, which is why he is now violently anti-Celt. The fairies are much nearer Shakespeare's quarrelsome and mischievous lot than Tolkien's elves; the Puck (not Puck, but *the* Puck) is particularly unpleasant, but not without his saving graces.

As I said, for lovers of the odd fantasy (and this is a *very* odd fantasy), *The Lastborn of Elvinwood* will be a find.

Not all the pleasures of the month were literary. I've spoken highly of the artist Michael Whelan's work before, but he may have outdone himself with his cover for the anthology, *Aliens,* portraying simply a flock of alien heads, surrounding (I think) his own. As for the inside of the book, it's what you'd expect from those knowledgeable editors, Gardner R. Dozois and Jack M. Dann: eleven stories exploring alien-human relationships by an all-star lineup with, as lagniappe, charming interior illustrations by Jack Gaughan and a guide to further reading on the subject. But even if you're bored to death by aliens *and* anthologies at this point, you'll want this one for the cover.

All that's the good news; now the bad news. The lesser of two evils is *The Green Gods* by N.C. Henneberg (billed as "the A. Merritt of France") in translation by C.J. Cherryh. Translations, of course, are notoriously tricky to review, since it's usually difficult for the reviewer to know whether any real awfuls in the text are the writer's or the translator's.

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When I saw that C.J. Cherryh had translated this one, I felt encouraged; certainly a writer of her craft could smooth out some of the hair-raising awkwardnesses I'd encountered in other translations of French SF. To my amazement, no such thing. We are presented with such prose as:

" 'This discussion,' said the globe, now covered with fine beads of anguish, 'is in danger of becoming academic'." and " 'There's little enough blood left on Earth,' the sea prince said harshly, 'but sap will run.' 'So there will be war between us,' said the plantish thought, almost sorrowfully."

There is page after page of this sort of stilted narrative, recounting a tale of a future Earth where man contests for mastery with sapient insects and mobile orchids and cacti, presented with almost no conviction or rationality. Lord knows, A. Merritt had his baroque and purple moments; but even the most excessive of them were rooted in some sort of pop scientific speculation; and he could tell a story with the best of them. Henneberg (who was in reality a husband and wife team; the wife continued solo after the husband's death and is apparently responsible for *The Green Gods*) can't.

And I guess I can't put it off any longer; I've got to say something about Alfred Bester's new novel, *Golem* [100]. Bester caused a sensation with his two SF novels of the '50s, and deservedly so. Then there was approximately a 20-year hiatus before the next novel, which was something of a disappointment.

The new one is more than something of a disappointment: it's a disaster. The cleverness has turned to cuteness; the hard-boiled, gritty quality that was such a revelation in the early works has turned nasty; what was funny is now just punny (a person from the id is an "iddividual"). Those two early novels were ahead of their time; these last two have an embarrassingly dated quality, as if they'd been written 15 years ago and stuck away somewhere. This latest one in particular smacks of that period a decade back when writers and filmmakers were seeing just how far they could go in terms of unpleasant sex and violence. It was an extreme stage that was needed, but I'm rather glad it's over and rather sad to see someone still doing it.

I won't waste your time and my space going into the plot. Suffice it to say that it has to do with a monster from a collective id; so far as I'm concerned, it was done a great deal better long ago in a movie called *Forbidden Planet*.

§ § §

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Back to neutral ground, thank God, and just space to note the publication of yet *another* reference book. This one is *The Literature of Fantasy* by Roger C. Schlobin, a "comprehensive, annotated bibliography of modern fantasy fiction." It seems reasonably complete, though as ever one can quibble about where the boundary lines are drawn, and most of the novels are provided with a brief synopsis. Not just scholars will find it useful, though I am afraid that all these handy, dandy guides are killing the wonderful serendipitous adventure of finding great books on one's own.

And finally, announcement of the publication of *Isaac Asimov's Adventures of Science Fiction* edited by George H. Scithers, a collection of stories from *Asimov's SF Adventure Magazine.*

—Baird Searles

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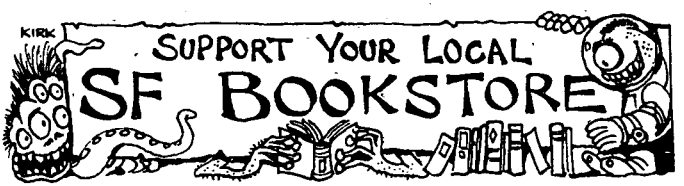
—John M. Ford



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KARL KOFOED
by Shawna McCarthy
art: Karl Kofoed

> For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
> Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be . . .
>
> Tennyson: *Locksley Hall*

It's rather corny, starting an interview with a quotation, but this one applies to Karl Kofoed so perfectly, I had to use it. For either Kofoed has access to a time machine, or he has one of the most intricate, fully developed visions of the future in SF art today. But then, he says he's always been a dreamer: "All that I knew in high school regarding my future career was that I was a dreamer who liked to draw . . . and that I was intensely curious about the world around me."

The 1950s and '60s, the decades in which he grew up and learned his craft, were extremely conducive to dreaming. In the '50s there was Sputnik and the beginning of the Space Race; in the '60s, technology was king, and all our problems could be solved with the deft application of computers and transistors. For a young man who liked to draw and dream, what could he do, other than become an SF illustrator?

Actually, quite a bit. After graduation from high school in 1961, the 18-year-old Kofoed went to Greenwich Village, the den-of-iniquity/artists' mecca (pick one) in New York City, and "hung around. I found it to be the same stimulating place they now make nostalgic movies about." After getting the hanging around out of the way, he enrolled in the Philadelphia College of Art as an illustration major. Oddly enough, though, he didn't really want to illustrate. "Though I was a reader of SF, and loved the worlds of Richard Powers and other cover illustrators, I didn't take it seriously, and never considered the possibility that I would be an SF artist."

By the time he graduated from college, he had a wife and daughter to consider, so he decided to look for "steady work." He found it as a technical illustrator with one of General Electric's spaceflight divisions. Doing technically perfect schematic drawings of engineering and electronics plans gave him a degree of accuracy and a feel of "working tight" that he would later find most useful.

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In 1967 he joined the art department of WHYY-TV in Philadelphia, and a year later moved to WKBS-TV in the same city. He was art director at WKBS when "Star Trek" and "The Outer Limits" began their syndication there, and he was called on to do paintings for slides and billboards promoting the shows. This was his first real attempt at SF art, and it provided a foretaste of things to come.

All in all, he spent eight years in TV, and looking back on it, he says, "I'm glad I went into it unfocussed as to my career, because I was open to all mediums and techniques. My eight years in television gave me experience in virtually all forms of visual communication, and an intimate understanding of color in film, TV, and print. I also learned commercial art from the ground up, and in greater breadth and detail than, say, an ad agency art director. I also learned to be egoless where the client is concerned, a skill that has proven valuable today."

After leaving WKBS in 1974, Kofoed moved to Studio One, then the major name in the poster industry. In between working on such poster "classics" as "Hang in there, baby," and "The job's not finished until the paperwork's done," he took time to work on paintings and drawings of a science fiction nature. Studio One had just undertaken to test-market one of his SF pieces as a poster when the company abruptly folded. This painting, however, was refined and retitled, and eventually became "Millenium Starship" in his "Galactic Geographic" series in *Heavy Metal* magazine.

It was after the demise of Studio One that Kofoed decided to become a freelancer; specifically, an SF and editorial illustrator. While he was developing his technique, he funded himself by working on such projects as *The Star Trek Crossword Poster,* cover art for *Uncle Jim's Things to Make,* and the coloring books, *The Jetsons' Vacation in Space* and *Alphabet Park.* His "Galactic Geographic" series also got its start during this period.

The "Galactic Geographic," for those not familiar with *Heavy Metal,* is a full-color, two-page spread that appears approximately bi-monthly in *Heavy Metal.* It is usually a scene from an alien planet, although it can be of any SF theme, from spaceships to BEMs. Along with the illustration, Kofoed provides copy describing the scene depicted. He began the project very shortly after *Heavy Metal* began publication, when a friend of his who had seen a copy of the magazine suggested Kofoed call on the editor. Kofoed did so, accompanied by a finished "Galactic Geographic." He had taken one of his alien-world paintings from his portfolio, written a short, colorful *National Geographic*–style caption for it, had the caption typeset, and pasted

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the whole thing up on a board with a color print of the painting. *Heavy Metal* bought it on the spot and commissioned more.

Of the series, Kofoed says, "I can vent my creative energy and my ego in the feature. The paintings in it began as a private project—to create credible views of alien worlds, with humans and blasters deleted for a change. The most difficult thing about the feature is the writing of the picture's description. It's difficult because it requires a lot of time and thought. I want it to have the same feel as the painting. Therefore, when I do illustrations for *Asimov's*, I'm grateful to be able to just illustrate, and let the authors do the writing—although it is gratifying to be able to do both when called upon to do so."

Kofoed's committment to his work is deep: "My chief love in art is to see imagination realized. When I read an *Asimov's* manuscript, I try to suit my skills to the author's imagination, to enhance and illuminate, rather than editorialize. I've always admired classical illustrators like N. C. Wyeth who generally elected to have a scene, rather than a collage of images, illustrate the story."

The technical knowledge gained from working in TV and at Studio One has indeed come in handy to him today. When working on a color illustration, whether it be for a cover or an interior, he is aware of the processes that go into the painting's reproduction. When asked about technique, he responded: "My stock answer to questions about technique is, 'By any means necessary,' although there's nothing arbitrary about it. I prefer water color (transparent washes) to opaques. I hate oils and use acrylics when necessary. I try to see the picture as the reproduction camera will see it, and compensate for a 10-percent loss of color when it prints. I deal with color in terms of primaries, as in the repro process. (Blue, red, yellow, and black are the only colors used in color reproduction.) Also, one of the things I dislike about the use of oils is that the finished product has a physical texture; I see it almost as another dimension to the painting, and I find it distracting. That's why I like to work in water colors. The flat surface of the finished product is almost as much a part of my goal as the design itself.

"I've forced myself to learn to work tight so the art doesn't have to be too large, although most of the pieces I've done lately have been twice their finished size. One recent job, though, required a view of the state of Illinois being blown into space, right off the map, in one chunk. It was a two-page spread, and just for the heck of it, I did it same-size. The resulting picture looks as though it was photographed by an orbiting weather station."

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Future and current projects include a new *Heavy Metal* feature titled "Stellar Journals," done in photo-essay style; and work on a Dell book, due out in the spring of 1980, titled *Junk Food*. The departing state of Illinois is slated for inclusion in this book as the last color spread in the volume.

"I like each job to be a challenge," Kofoed says, and in the future, he'd like to face a different sort of challenge. "I'd like to work on the creation of alien worlds for films. Perhaps the next generation of SF films will find audiences are tired of watching 'people fighting people in space,' and would like more imaginative background for actors to romp in. When that need arises, I'm ready."

SF fans are beginning to recognize Kofoed's talents. He was the artist guest-of-honor at the 1979 Philcon, held last November at the Sheraton Valley Forge hotel in Pennsylvania. Of his selection as guest of honor he says, "Well, I was very surprised and pleased. But mostly pleased. I'm delighted to be part of the science fiction community, and I hope I can continue to contribute to its progress."

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SING A SONG OF MALLWORLD

by Somtow Sucharitkul

art: Karl B. Kofoed

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The clavichrome piece in this story, "Light on the Sound," is a real composition. It's the opening section of a group of pieces for piano written by Mr. Sucharitkul for the virtuoso pianist Violet Lam. It's also the title of the author's second novel, which he's working on now, set in the Inquestor universe. These obscure cross-references are intended to befuddle twenty-first century historians.

Well . . . I guess I'm ready to start.

It's hard.

I suppose you people out there–and I'm assuming, for my own sanity's sake, that there *are* people out there, people who have paid good money to hear the great Julian barJulian XIII pour out his heart–I suppose you think it's easy for an old pro like me. I'm here, alone in this room in Mallworld with my clavichrome, I've fixed all the settings on the machine, I've strapped myself in and I've stuck all the electrodes in the right places, and now I'm going to overwhelm the lot of you with sound and color . . . and you'll sit in front of your holovee with the tacto-olfacto inputs and fall into a world I created out of my pain, my love, my everything.

Well . . . I guess I'm ready to start.

I'm going to tell you how I became who I am. And yet–

Should I start with the wild party in the Gaza Plaza Hotel, when the gang got smashed on Levitol and floated down the corridors of Mallworld, pursued by gaggles of little six-inch high security comsims, and Annetta overdosed and hit her head on the ceiling of a crazi-gravi hallway and got a concussion?

Or do I tell you about Mallworld itself, the thirty-kilometer long shopping center that floats in the loneliness between the asteroids and Jupiter, that has *everything,* from robots to rice crispies?

Or do I start with the time I was five and we went down to Nick's Music Store on level Q91, and I banged my chubby fist on the mechanism and knocked out a whole level of Mallworld in a maelstrom of sound and light?

With multi-great-grandad, who won the choice of the title to half a million cubiklicks between the belt and Jupiter, or a lifetime supply of deodorant soap . . . and obstinately chose the former, out of sheer romantic holovision-addicted starstruckness?

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Mustn't ramble . . .

When I was a kid, not many kids actually lived in Mallworld. They still don't. All the people who operate the twenty thousand shops, hotels, department stores, holopalaces, brothels, psychiatric concessions, suicide parlours, and churches commute to Mallworld on the transmat, which is instantaneous, so they might live as far away as Deimos or Ganymede. But there were a number of us who did live there: for instance, the quads–Pico, Nano, Femto, and Atto LaGuardia–their mother was human arbitrator of Mallworld, a sinecure that coughs up a kilocred a day. Annetta's father is alien liaison, another sinecure since *homo sapiens* no longer runs its own affairs–and, as for me–

Mallworld just happens to be on a transmat nexus, which makes it a highly desirable location. And when they located it, a hundred and fifty years ago, where would that be but the very worthless semimegacubiklick of space that multigramps had laughingly taken instead of a ton of soap. When my grandad noticed–

My family is *rich*. Try figuring one percent of Mallworld's gross, over a hundred and fifty years, plus compound interest. My father stopped counting it; the amount can't be humanly imagined, it's just a theoretical geometric progression in the mind of a computer somewhere. We adopted a simpler way of collecting the rent: I just wander around freely in Mallworld and take anything I want.

Owning the world is a natural for Julian barJulian XIII.

Like everyone else who is *us*, I was spoilt, lazy, affected, bored, isolent, languid, decadent. Of the seven or eight in the gang, I was by far the richest, and consequently, by direct square law, the spoiltest, laziest, affectedest, and so on.

I only had two saving graces. One–well, when my dad decided to have me, he walked into Storkways Inc. on the maternity level and purchased the highest IQ that money could buy. And also, being an old-fashioned kind of person, he picked the standard soma, so I don't have wings or four arms or a green skin like many of my friends did–victims of the cult of individuality that the rich and bored profess to this day.

And then I played the clavichrome. Even before the events I'm about to tell you lucky people . . . I was pretty talented. Technically, I could outplay all my teachers by the time I was fourteen. I did the classic stuff, with each key linked to a specific chromawavelength and basically angular contours; I could also do a certain amount of the new virtuoso stuff with the variable colorstructures (random or controlled) and I was beginning to produce some highly derivative

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stuff on my own.

That's what I'm saying with hindsight, mind you. In those days I had a somewhat higher opinion of my own abilities. After all, there weren't any competent critics around, and who'd want to offend the offspring of Julian barJulian XII, and risk losing a substantial gratuity?

Well; that was *us,* the Mallworld gang, thirty or forty years ago. We were all in our late teens, finishing up from the same school–the St. Martin Luther King Traditional-Style Strict and Snooty School, which took up a whole hollowed-out mini-planetoid in Jovian orbit.

As a counterpoint to this rich, bored and decadent theme, there was *them.*

You see them still, flitting in the shadows of Mallworld, in the corner of your eye in a corridor, slim things, just shadowshapes. They're the runaways who hustle by the B46 entrance. You can always tell them. They don't have a mothersurrogate robot in tow. They're not yelling for another algae bar or petting the live Fomalhautan gaboochi in the live alien animal stand. There's no electric shopping bag laden with goodies levitating two paces behind their chubby heels.

No. You step out of a demat-booth onto a new level and you tell your shopping bag to make a left and suddenly you'll see one dart across your field of vision; and he'll look at you like he knows all of you down to the core, a haunted, hunted look . . . but innocent. The look'll last just a millisecond and he'll have vanished and you'll never see him again . . . or you'll see another face and you'll think it's him, but actually it's a *her,* and you'll never be sure. . . .

And that's where I'll start my story. The day I found out where they came from, and where they so mysteriously disappeared to.

It was the day the seven of us came home for the Long Vacation. Our school, patronized by the "us" of various colonies, was very long on tradition and kept to the almost meaningless Earthtime: we had a "summer" vacation of three "months" every "year." It was a depressing last day; we'd been doing human history and the teacher had taken it upon himself to take the class on a field trip to Saturn's orbit where we saw for ourselves the edge of the universe that we've been shunted into by the Selespridar until "such time as *homo sapiens* achieves maturity and is fit to join the rest of the galaxy." We gazed out of the school bus onto nothingness; and then the bus's holoZeiss segued into images of how the stars used to look, and it was like Saturn and all its icy rings had suddenly been stitched into

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a tapestry of burning lights . . . and then they turned it off again, and Saturn shone alone in the blackness. Then we bused past the Selespridon shieldstations which kept the forceshield constantly in place, knowing that just beyond them, but infinitely far away in a whole 'nother universe, was everything that mankind had ever dreamed about.

It was enough to make you depressed for weeks on end; and in fact it was the school's policy (you know, one of the good old "traditions") to rub its students' noses in the human condition the whole time, so we'd never forget that we aren't free . . . *yet.*

And afterwards we assembled in the gymnasium, and the principal gave a long speech about St. Martin Luther King, a former pope on old Terra who was said to have led the holy war against the King Kong of Southeast Asia (hence his title)–it was empty stuff, exhorting us by example. To show you just how "traditional" our school was: the Vatican had formally removed St. Martin Luther King from its canon some ten years before my dad signed my delivery contract! Be that as it may . . .

After that the teachers gathered in front of the principal, and he pressed the button that dissolved them all back into the computer, and then we sang a hymn, and then the gang gathered for the exit and raced to the parking lot.

I was the official owner of the us bus, a little thing I'd picked up from the Toyochev Carpalace on A46. We jammed into it, and I pressed the coordinates and promptly fell asleep.

It was my birthday; and a present from dad, unopened, was in my autosatchel the whole time. Shows you how exhausted–and depressed–I was. I didn't come to until the car transmatted out of the ring of buoys and entered Mallworld space. The quads and Annetta were glumly puffing away on wads of chewing gum, stinking up the car. . . .

We floated down the nothing tubes and burst into Mallworld. All of us were restless; rather hyper; and very, very depressed over the history lesson.

"Let's go and hit the monopole skating rink!" said Annetta. Her gaiety was rather forced. Nobody paid any attention. "How about the human pinball game? How about a race round the comsim safari park?"

Mallworld was always impressive after two months in boarding school. I stood there, drinking in the sheer size of the thing. There was level upon level on either side of our corridor, down and up as far as you could see, and demat-booths every hundred meters or so,

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and signs and holoads yelling at you to buy the latest cars, whores, skating gloves, body changes, copulo-androids, breakfast cereals, pet gaboochis, pocket holoZeisses, mother-surrogates, monomolecular brassieres, babies . . . and the people! They rushed into demat-booths, they slidewalked along the mobiustripping crazi-gravi-corridors, some in seemly nakedness, others in the most outré of Babylonian potato-sacks, others with vestigial second heads and other becoming cosmetic surgery . . . and the constant jabbering, mumbling, bawling, and babbling was music to my ears, after the silent empty corridors of St. Martin Luther King's.

Well–

"Let's have a party, at least," Annetta was saying, fluttering her six-inch purple eyelashes languidly at the quads.

"But where?" I heard one of them say. I was staring at the mob, drinking in the sounds, so I didn't really take part in the conversation.

I found us racing into a demat-booth and materializing in *my* suite at the Gaza Plaza Hotel. I knew they were all mooching off me, the richest, but what did I care? I was too depressed to say anything. We entered the lobby, a couple of six-inch-high computer simulacrums dressed in Turkish fezes bowed us up to my suite, I let them have the big party room, and I went into a bedroom to stew in private. It was a nice hotel; it was built in the shape of the great pyramid of Khufu on earth, and each room was a pyramid, too; some of them were upside-down pyramids, interlocking with each other, with alternating gravi-ups and gravi-downs, all done by a clever Selespridon imported device. I banged the door on my friends–from my point of view they were standing upside-down on the ceiling of the next room–and sat on the floatbed. I was in the prime of teenagerhood, and much given to fits of depression. . . .

Something was wrong with my life.

And I wasn't smart enough, or objective enough, to have the faintest idea what it was. I knew that I had anything I wanted, and couldn't really complain. But life grated on me.

I thought of giving Dad a call, but I knew he'd get mad at me. He'd enrolled in the Xenobuddhist cult of nothingness and spent all his time staring at the navels of alien holosculptures. And all he would do would be to give me more money. It always worked–he thought.

I paced around, imagining myself in a turbulent maelstrom of creative achievement, once or twice almost reaching for the clavichrome console. . . .

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Then I thought of the present from Dad.

I subvoked an order to my school satchel; it came over to me and disgorged a little package. I broke the seal, and it was a little black box with electrodes sprouting out of it. I looked for instructions–St. Martin's taught reading among its more useless accomplishments, and so it was a rather silly, ingrained reflex–but found nothing; so I held it in my hand and waited. Presently, it spoke.

"Hello, Master Julian barJulian XIII. I an a present from your father, Julian barJulian XII, on the occasion of your seventeenth birthday, Earth reckoning. I'm a new attachment for your clavichrome, only this year (Earth reckoning) developed by the Clavichrome Monopoly Corp in its Deimos Labs. Happy birthday. We call it the *psionic amplifier* or *psifi.* Basically, it adds a whole new dimension to clavichrome performances by enhancing any "psi" abilities that may be latent in you—which are rather limited in *homo sapiens,* according to the Selespridar—so that images from the unconscious, precognitive or telepathic, for example, that would never otherwise ever become conscious, may be imposed consciously upon the clavichrome's visual spectrum. At the first level, the psifi may be operated by inserting electrode A with the pink identifier into—"

Well done, Dad! I thought. *Your first* meaningful *present in years.* I listened to the rest of the instructions with half an ear. I was already impatient to try it out. The hookup was just like any of the other clavichrome add-ons; electrodes in the head (I'd had external DIN inputs connected up long before then, of course) and in the main body of the console. I cheered up considerably and told the bedroom door to accordion open.

The party was in full swing. The whole of *us* was there–and a few crashers too, acquaintances from other colonies or from school, whose parents had come to Mallworld for their shopping sprees. I spidered up the wall to the other room's *gravi-down* and plonked myself in a chairfloat. Everything buzzed pleasantly. . . .

"Hey, play us a tune," said Pico suddenly. He had turned aside from some argument with Femto (easy to tell them apart: their names were embedded in fluorescent pink crystalchips on their foreheads). The others turned too, acknowledging my appearance (it *was* my place . . .), and then they stopped whatever they were doing and looked at me expectantly. I saw the identical idolatrous look in the quads' faces.

I've never been able to resist that.

So I hooked up.

I was still in the showoff stage then. I guess everyone goes through

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it, but in hindsight it gives me little shivers of embarassment. You have this huge, four-layered twelve-octave keyboard, each tone adjustable to the 66 subdivisions of the octave, with selectable overtones. You have this gigantic chromatic apparatus that sends out spurts of color and spins exquisite patterns in the air, and you can key the colors any way you want. You can have each tone correspond to a point in the visible light spectrum–that's the standard setting–or any other settings; you can generate random correspondences or have correspondences in any pattern you want, simple, quadratic, whatever. The keys are so sensitive that the slightest pressure change in your fingers can alter the whole perspective. You can subvoke instructions to a hundred little black boxes for new patterns and images. And with the psifi, you'd add a whole 'nother layer of meaning and texture to the piece. . . .

I couldn't resist trying out Dad's present, even though I'd never practiced with a psionically sensitive instrument in my life. But I was just a kid.

I hung on until the hush was complete. Annetta hung from the pointed ceiling, completely outside everything.

Then I launched into *Light on the Sound.*

That's one of the most famous pieces ever written, and I couldn't really play it. I started it too fast and decided to bluff the thing out. I sent out volleys of starclusters to counterpoint the dizzy fournote lefthand ostinato, then improvised some patches of glitterwhorls over a deep blue background that I sustained with the foot pedals. In the background I could hear them gasp–the gullible philistines! Anyone can do fireworks on a clavichrome.

I got mad at them.

I bet they wouldn't notice even if I started making it up, I thought. Even though it's practically the most famous solo clavichrome piece in the world. I started fooling around. I threw myself into the thing–

I introduced a perky sort of boogie rhythm into the bass and matched it with fuzzy pink outlines that flitted nervously between the firetongues. Getting angrier, I lashed the light columns together with chains of crystal. I added a rain of highpitched songpellets that threatened to drown the whole theme. . . .

Then I remembered that the psifi was hooked on, and I wasn't quite in control of it. Horrible, dirty pictures of lewd women in potato-sacks started prancing across the wall, silly adolescent fantasies–I heard them laughing, all my friends. They probably thought it was a neat party trick. And then, suddenly, out of the very bottom of my mind, a vision blurred into view and hung for a tiny moment–

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It was a girl. Small and soft and vulnerable; green eyes that cut you in two, they were so piercing; and wild hair like the veldt in the comsim safari park; and she was about to speak and then she popped out of existence and I tore the plugs out of my head and turned the machine off in an angry impulse.

It sure wasn't Annetta. Purple eyelashes, pink pseudowings, and permanently zonked out on Levitol.

"Hey, Jules, why'd you stop?" said Femto. "That was some combustible chick you conjured up just then."

"Leave me alone!"

"Uh. The guy's demented with lust," giggled Atto prudishly. The LaGuardias were a somewhat prudish family; they limited their fooling around to their immediate family. Whether insecurity or narcissism I don't know–it was *their* problem.

"C'mon," said someone, "we have to cheer him up. Let's go and hit the corridors!"

"Coming?" said Femto and Pico in unison. Nano had spidered up to get Annetta off the ceiling. She was quietly coming to . . .

Femto turned to Pico and continued their argument.

"There are no stairs in Mallworld!" he said.

"There are so stairs in Mallworld," Pico retorted.

"Where the hell are they, then? It's always been demat-booths from the moment Mallworld was built, and everyone knows it's the historic first all-demat-booth colony world ever constructed!"

"What about while they were building the demat-booths? Are you going to tell me that the builders crawled along a thousand times thirty klicks of corridors just to install them? You're crazy!"

"Shut, up, everyone!" I yelled. I couldn't hear myself think. What a useless argument, anyway! If there were stairs in Mallworld, no one knew where they were, No one used them.

"Hey," said Annetta in her shrill, affected voice. "Let's get a Levitol convoy going!" Everyone chorused agreement, and someone stuffed a Levitol tablet into my hand. I didn't want to seem like a spoilsport, so–

(That girl! The fleeting image jumped through my mind . ... who *is* she? Did the psifi bring out something I had subliminally plucked from the mind of one of the others? If so she wasn't mine! I was angry at the thought. Or was it a flash of unconscious precog that the psifi had caused to surface? I–)

In a trice we'd all linked hands to toes and were buoyed up by the Levitol and were a chain hovering in the air. I was near the front holding onto Annetta, whose eyes were glazed over. A warm feeling

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came over me, and I couldn't think too clearly anymore.

"Let's hit the corridors!" Annetta shrieked. We snaked out the door, did a stomach-turning gravi-twist to adjust to a new down, and corkscrewed through the hotel lobby at about a twenty-klick clip.

Suddenly a swarm of six-inch-high little men in pink uniforms were flitting about my shoulder.

"Sir!" they buzzed. "We are computer simulacra of the security wing, serial numbers SEC3556 through 69! Levitol tripping is permissible only in designated or private areas! Kindly cease this prohibited activity this instant!"

"Buzz off, comsim scum!" Pico shouted happily, and we all started to cackle uncontrollably, warming to the end-of-school feeling. We swerved into a central corridor and did figure-eights round an elderly couple who were petting a lapdog. Then we collided with a stack of auto-shopping bags and one of them tried to stuff Annetta into a half-open sack of surrogate cabbages. Femto, at the end of the line, swung forward and booted it hard and we were off again!

"Kindly return to your room!" the comsims chanted monotonously in the background.

The Levitol was wearing off . . .

I was diving, didn't quite know what I was doing . . . landed right in the fast lane of a delivery slidewalk and the chain broke. We broke up with hysteria as the slidewalk whipped past Gimbel and Gamble's Department Store and Feeliepalace and through a light-streaked game arcade.

Suddenly the comsims materialized again. "You have ignored our repeated requests," they chorused. "A disciplinary robot will arrive shortly and will disperse you to the custody of your respective parents or parent-surrogates."

A burly clunker popped out of the nearest demat-booth and jumped onto the slidewalk and made straight for us. We did a wild obstacle race over bales of pickled Denebian whiteworms bound for the alien gourmet delis, and the thing rolled inexorably towards us, gaining at every step. . . .

"Quick!" I said. "We have to get off this thing!"

"Into that pinball machine!" Atto yelled, as we dived off the slidewalk and sent our friend racing towards the far horizon.

"Tickets! Tickets!" said the salesbot. "Oh, it's *you,*" it grunted, recognizing me. "Ho! Seven–eight–nine freebies coming up!" We grabbed our free mallets and crawled one by one into the little coccoons that were being fed into the giant air rifle.

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I exploded from the boom tube, soared up, my mallet askew, into the middle of the pinball machine, then landed right on the center rotating circle! The 3,000 bell was just beyond my grasp and I knew I could bang it with the mallet if I could just coordinate the swing with the swerve, right on the galactic pongo's luminous nose. I strained with the mallet and was just hitting it when the circle upended and tossed me into the frictionless dust; and I was on my back slithering down a slope and flailing at the emptiness, with the tingtingtinging of the pongo receding into the distance; and I was still spinning from the momentum of the circle–

I stared right up to the topmost spectator tier and could see my score in sixty-foot-long computer digits and the rows of gamblers, each with his little notepad, tier after tier of them . . . and the glass gangplanks criss-crossing the air about eight meters above my head, where repair robots scuttled along, monitoring the wild proceedings below . . .

A twister sprang up and shoved me upslope where I caromed off a *tingtingtingtitingtiting* bubblebeastie and veered to the left, just smashing the corner of the red button and it lit up and announced perkily TRIPLE SCORE WHEN LIT TRIPLE SCORE WHEN LIT! I saw two kids barrelrolling through the 200-point croquet hoops and narrowly missed them, slipped onto a randomspindisk and slung myself round a curve and caught a handle and braked to a giddy stop, still slithering in the frictionless dust. Pink and blue candystripe ripples rouletted in the sand . . . I was panting. I strained to see my score: 50,720. Not bad, and I was still a good three hundred meters from the autoflippers, Scylla and Charybdis. If I lost my hold on the handle before I'd chance to think up a strategy, I'd be off on random again.

My ears perked up. There was a commotion in the stands. People were yelling, "Stop her! Stop thief!" What was going on? I heard a patterclatter on the glass gangplanks eight meters over my head and saw legs of a girl in tatters, feet pounding the glass and a couple of metal clunkers clanking after her and a swarm of security comsims buzzing "Shoplifting prohibited! You are under arrest!" at her, and the girl looked down at me and–

Jumped and crashed right on top of me. In a split second I'd lost my handhold and we were off!

Her face was two centimeters from mine; I didn't have time to figure out who it–

It was *her!*

The green eyes piercing me, the yellow-green wild-grass hair,

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caught in the pinball airstream and eclipsing the candystripe lights–

We tumbled. I noticed some of the crowd was standing up, yelling something.

"Get your filthy hands off me!" she rasped. It wasn't at all the voice I expected.

"Who are you, you, you–" My eyes must have been wide as Jupiters; I could hardly speak, and I wanted to know so desperately . . . I clutched her as inertia swept us downslope towards Scylla and Charybdis, and she was pummeling me the whole time and telling me to let go and we rolled over in the sand and I kept stammering "Who are you?" and then I suddenly realized there was only one reason the buzzards would be trying to arrest her for shoplifting. . . .

She was one of *them!*

I heard a thud behind us as the clunkers dropped down after her. One of them spun by thrashing its steely cuff-tentacles vainly after us; the other gained steadily on us, gingerly stepping-stoning on the randomspindisks.

"Hold on, damn it, I'm trying to help you!" I said. The scent of her filled my nostrils, confusing me. I jammed a lever with my mallet *en passant* and flipped us upslope with a flop, and we shot past the clunker, and I childishly nyah-nyahed him as he slid helplessly into Scylla and Charybdis.

Pico, Nano, Atto, and Femto daisychained whooshing into the open maw, and then I saw in dismay that the flippers weren't working, they'd jimmied them so's to catch us, and I clutched her struggling and we zoomed down the last hundred meters into the gigantic gaping blackness . . .

Into the arms of a dozen clunkers. We were in a cordoned-off area at the entrance to the corridor, and a crowd was already gathering to gawk, some of them shouting for their money back and complaining about foul bets.

"You are under arrest," announced the gaggle of comsims, materializing.

"Wait a minute!" I said. Was I going to lose the girl out of my precog fantasy the instant I'd run into her? Was this all it was going to come to? "She's with me, damn it! Let her go!"

The crowd was silent suddenly. Hostile eyes glared at me. I put my arm around the girl and felt her yield just slightly, acknowledging me for the first time. I held out my thumb so the comsim could check my identity. It paused for a time, then protested, "Sir, the law . . . "

"Oh, you know what the law can go do to itself," I said furiously.

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"I'll give the store a kilocred if they don't prosecute. Two, three, I don't care." The crowd gasped at this unexpected turn of events.

"Now wait a minute," said the girl.

"I'll handle this!" I was starting to enjoy the scene. I was especially starting to enjoy the prospect of being alone with her afterwards and basking in the warm flow of inevitable gratitude, and maybe a bit more . . . I mean, I'd just saved her from six months in a sanitization club, hadn't I?

There was a hardness to her that was different from how the psifi had shown her to me, but underneath was incomprehension, hurt–only a wisp of tattered firefur clung to her body. Her hair swept over and obscured her forehead. And on her cheek, the left cheek–I hadn't seen it either, in my psifi reverie–was a white scar like a baroque pearl.

"Verdict: released into the custody of Julian barJulian XIII," came the voice of the Arbitration Computer, through the mouths of the comsims. The crowd began to disperse. She pulled away from me; I held on to her wrist and demanded, "What's your name?"

She broke free and bolted through the entrance into the corridor, knocking over a mother-surrogate and baby . . . I stopped thinking and just ran.

I could see her. She was fast! Already she was threading through swarms of gossiping matrons, barely skimming the floor, cutting across to the delivery slidewalks–

I was within a meter of her. I got nearer–

She fled into a demat-booth. There was just a centimeter between my hand and her elbow, and the booth didn't know the difference and the safety factor locked on and I was whisked off with her and we materialized on another level just outside THE WAY OUT Suicide Parlour; and then she ran straight into the wall and pressed a stud on it and the wall started to slide . . . I wedged my toe in and caught hold of her and then I just gaped!

I blinked once or twice, straightened out my skimpy tunic, looked again . . .

"I guess it's no use," she said. "You're one of *them,* and now you know."

"Wait a minute," I said. "*You're* them. I'm *us.*"

We both laughed rather nervously, and I blinked again and I still couldn't believe where this was . . .

We were in between two layers of Mallworld's skin.

The metal gleam stretched up and away and down and away and to every side for as far as I could see, a mirror curved into for-

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ever . . . the far wall, perhaps fifty meters away, was connected to where we were standing (a sort of platform) by an intricate network of catwalks and strange twisted staircases that spiralled into infinity it seemed–it was vast. *Vast.*

Yes, Pico LaGuardia, I thought, suddenly remembering the quads' little argument at my party, *yes, there* are *stairs in Mallworld. What stairs they are!*

Winding like strands of giga-DNA.

And runged ladders hugging the sides. Snakes and silver ladders.

"Well," said the girl, "goodbye."

I suddenly noticed what it was that she had stolen, that she had risked six months in the clinker for, tucked into her torn belt.

It was a doll.

She turned and started up a ramp, her arms catching at supports and metal protuberances with an easy familiarity. She swung herself up onto another platform.

I wasn't going to watch her recede into the metal vastness . . . "Wait!" I shouted. The echo came, intense, frightening. "What's your name?"

A laughter resounded from all around, silvery as the walls themselves. . . .

"Letisha!" (. . . *tishatishatishhhhhhhhh* . . .)

And she was gone.

It was a strange day to begin the Long Vacation with. I brooded after that; none of my friends seemed human, real. I saw her face whenever I played the clavichrome; and then I grew disgusted with my playing, for the first time. I saw her in dreams, hovering at the point of the ceiling in my bedroom . . . but it was a week before I screwed up the courage to go back and look for her.

And there I was, staring at the handle that led to another world . . .

On my left was the vestibule of THE WAY OUT Corp. Its display sign whispered enticingly: "Tired of life? Why not . . . kill yourself? Over three hundred ways possible–most reversible! Money-back guarantee if not completely satisfied . . ."

I shuddered and touched the stud. The slam of the metal door reechoed behind me and out into emptiness. I didn't want to make a sound so I dissolved my shoes. Metal chilled my soles.

What was it about that girl? Was it her alienness, the fact that she belonged to a whole 'nother kind of life that I'd never seen before? I resolved myself and went up the ramp that was flung out

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over a drop to nothingness. Around me the hugeness was threatening; it was vaster than I'd remembered. A dim light shone from inlaid photopanels and was reflected back and forth across the silvergleam . . . the air smelt strange, ancient, and I expected dust on the ramp but it was spotless.

I tried to remember which way she'd gone. Staircases twisted past me like elfin columns, vanishing to points in a gray loftiness. *She can't have gone that far . . . they must live here somewhere . . .* I swung myself up onto another level, the way I'd seen her do. I went up the stairs that angled out to the next catwalk; it didn't feel like *up,* more like sideways. I think there were leaks from the various gravi-control devices in the contiguous areas of Mallworld, so that my weight yoyoed and sometimes I had to do flips to stay on top. Spirals crossed overhead in not-quite-comprehensible patterns, and always the antiseptic virgin gleam of the metal shone, so that I passed through light-pools webbed by coiling shadows . . .

Then–

Voices. Echoshifted whispers in a low circling around my head. I froze. I was enveloped in a steep curving of stairway, and I peered through a gap in the steel and saw them.

Across a two-meter gulf was a railinged platform. Some sort of weird ritual was going on.

Self-lighting candles, obviously pilfered from the Catholic Cathedral on the religious level, glowed at the corners of the platform. About fifteen teenagers were crowded around in a circle. They were all nude and for a moment I thought the strange colors of their skins were just genetic mutapigment like some of my friends'. But it was skinpaint–vivid greens, deep blues, fiery reds, with contrasting patterns in thick, angular strokes. They were wild-looking, like primitive Earthies in prehistoric holomovies . . . I couldn't make out what they were saying yet, so I leaned forward and stuck part of my face through the chink, hoping the light wouldn't fall on me.

They stopped suddenly and turned to their leader, the one with no body paint. He couldn't have been more than thirteen, and he had a classic, expensive-looking soma that suggested rich parents. He looked a lot like me . . . except that he had shoulder-length purple hair and–they shone clearly even at this distance–eyes of deep mauve. Something about those eyes . . .

There was an appalling emptiness in his eyes.

He waved his hand and they scrunched together, cross-legged, in a huddle. "Reports!" he said. He had a staccato, high voice with an aftertaste of wistfulness.

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A girl spoke. *Letisha!*

"Two of us have been captured by *them* and sentenced to one year each in a sanitization club. We have acquired additional beddings for the two new members who have run away from bible belt."

I held my breath. This was Letisha all right, but how different! Blue paint covered her from head to foot, and from her navel radiated garish scarlet spokes of paint. There was something . . . *hypnotized* about her, about all of them.

I was scared stiff. *Mustn't breathe–*

"We must say an act of contrition in remembrance of them," said the leader: again that curious voice. It had an attraction I couldn't define in it, the voice of that boy; it was at once totally authoritative and pleading, hurt. The whole group started to mumble incomprehensibly.

So this was where *they* came from, where *they* disappeared to. In this unknown world, they had thrown behind them all the overlays of civilization that they had brought with them when they ran away from their colony worlds, whether from poverty or from intolerable families or ideologies . . . they were savages! Superstitious, mud-eating savages like the bow-and-arrow-slinging, gas-guzzling ancients!

I saw Letisha and realized that I wanted to be like her. Amid the whackiness, the weirdness, there was a solemnity that worried me but also made me a little envious. Because I hadn't had a serious thought in my whole life that I could remember. Oh, I'd been angry, frustrated, infatuated . . . but these people were obssessed.

That was new to me.

They began chanting a quiet litany whose words I could not make out. Then the leader spoke again, in his curiously haunting voice: "We are all here in Mallworld for but a brief span, aren't we? And I have come to comfort you. There are hundreds of lost children lurking in hidden passageways, sleeping in the stairwells, emerging to gyp and hustle and shoplift. But we alone have the light."

The others started mumbling, their eyes fixed on the void that was their leader's face. He went on: "There's a world beyond the orbit of Saturn, beyond the Selespridon barrier. One day, when our little time in Mallworld is over, we will emerge from our cocoons and shatter the forceshield and enter the world of starlight!"

The mumbling increased, became a distant-tempest sound. I saw that Letisha was as drawn to the leader as the rest. And as for me–

They were beautiful words, and the voice was beautiful, and only the week before I'd had this dreadful experience learning about the

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rulers of the galaxy and man's isolation, and the words seemed to offer somekind of mystical hope . . . I didn't believe it of course. I knew it was metaphysical drivel. And yet–

That kid! Those vacant, mauve eyes! For a moment I even forgot about Letisha and was spellbound by the kid's charisma.

"Listen, all of *us*," he said. "You love me, don't you?"

"We love you, Yitsakh," they chanted.

"You'd die for me, wouldn't you?"

"We'd die for you, Yitsakh . . . "

I was shivering. The echoes went on and on, diminishing infinitely into the curved metal. I wasn't equipped to deal with this.

Then the leader said, his voice rising, "The pact! The pact! Remember the pact!"

"The pact! The pact!" they repeated, and the echoes of the *-ct -ct* sounds clicked as they trickled past me. . . .

They began to chant again. "Once a year a child is born, once a year a child must die! Once a year a child is born, once a year a child must die!" The chant grew and grew until the whole huge emptiness was resonating. And I knew that this strange religion the *them* were clinging to must contain something sinister behind the lovely images.

One of them pulled out a test-tube filled with some kind of liquid. I pushed my face hard against the gap in the stairway and saw what it was–a Storkways test-tube of the kind used for fertilizing ova. The leader took the tube and placed it in the center of the group and then twisted it with his wrist to start it spinning.

"Whosoever this shall point to, let him join the lord's anointed!" he cried in a singsong voice. The test-tube slowed down . . .

And pointed to Letisha.

"Letisha!" said the leader. "You are the lucky one who will join the stars. What have you chosen to kill yourself with?"

I couldn't contain myself any longer. "No!" I screamed. They all rose up and looked around; the kid nearest me caught sight of my eye disappearing from the crack; in a second two of them had caught hold of the banister and vaulted themselves over and I was caught and pinioned. I was hot all over.

"Save yourself, Letisha!" I yelled. "Don't let 'em get you!"

I felt giddy as the two, still clutching me tight, vaulted expertly back on to the platform. I stared wildly around me. Fifteen kids in savage body-paints threatened from all sides.

I had to brazen it out. "What kind of crazy suicide pact is this? What right do you guys have to go around ordering kids to commit

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suicide?"

"You're one of *them!*" said the leader, in a voice devoid of anger. I saw that he *pitied* me . . . "Who are you?"

"I'm Julian barJulian," I said, "the thirteenth, and I own the space you live in."

"Who can own space?" the leader said, mocking me gently. "Life is just a fleeting transience."

"You're crazy!"

Letisha spoke. Her voice was quiet, curiously convincing. "No, Julian. *You're* crazy."

"Shall we throw him over the edge?" said one of the kids, as nonchalantly as if he'd said *Shall I wash the dishes?* I opened my mouth and couldn't speak.

"What do you think, my people?" said Yitsakh. Again, no harsh emotions. "Letisha, you are the one that seems to know him. Why have you been mixing with these shallow, meaningless people, these people of the shadows?"

Letisha said, "Yitsakh, I don't know who he is. Last week he rescued me from the clinkerclunks. Don't ask me why. Maybe there's some good in him. . . ."

"We can't let him go!" said a voice. "He'll tell on us!"

"Will you?" said Yitsakh. He didn't look at me.

"What do you think I am?" I said hotly.

"We *know* what you are," said another one, and I felt the incredible scorn in his voice and was stung.

"He won't tell," said Letisha softly. I looked at her in surprise. For a moment, our eyes met and I struggled against my captors. I thought I saw something there . . . but she looked away quickly, as though ashamed of having shown me any part of herself. Then she said to Yitsakh: "He looks a little like you, Yitsakh. I think he came from the same batch. The only difference is that he has normal, dark brown hair, and–" She went on like this for a while, and I suddenly realized that Yitsakh was blind. "Yitsakh, you know I love you. We all do. I know he won't hurt us, I'm telling you on my love for you. And now that I'm about to die I think you should spare him. . . ."

So much for all my delusions that the girl would fall into my arms in gratitude for my saving her hide! Touché! *That* debt was wiped out for sure.

"Very well," said Yitsakh. The empty purple eyes stared through me into . . . what? Did he see the reaches of space beyond our universe, where the Selespridar lived and the stars shone?

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I was going to lose her! And now I knew for sure that I was in love with her. I had to have her for myself. I had to win her away from this mad prophet of the stairways. "I don't know the way back," I said, "I'm lost."

"I will escort him back," said Letisha–and my heart lifted–"and return for the rest of the ceremony." My heart sank again.

"You won't let this stranger tempt you from the pact?" said Yitsakh, suddenly a child.

I saw that this was what she loved in him. His vulnerability, his certitude. He had power, that boy. . . . "Of course I won't let him tempt me," she said. And kissed him on the cheek, very lightly, and turned to me with expressionless eyes. "Let's go."

I was going to try my hardest to tempt her. And she knew it, too. I knew that she saw it as some kind of test. Inside I screamed, *You're in a trap! Come out and let me love you!*

Letisha beckoned once; they released me and we left by a different catwalk from the ones I'd seen before. I saw that on a string round her waist hung the doll she had stolen.

"Ease onto this banister," she said. "Careful."

We slid down a straight stretch of stairway, slowly–it was a low-gee section–and then were inside another spiral. She didn't say anything except to whisper directions in the same flat voice.

"You're coming with me!" I said as soon as I knew we were out of earshot. "You can't stay with them, they're monsters, and you deserve a better chance . . ."

"Shut up."

I stumbled on a jagged piece of metal. Without any fuss she picked me up and set me going again.

"Look, I'm rich. You can have anything you want. Just stay with me awhile, OK? Then you can go back to your weird savages . . ."

"I know all about you," she said. "More than you think. You have no idea how narrowly you missed being killed. If any of the others had actually *realized*–"

"What?" She was so close to me!

"Never mind."

All too soon we had reached the platform where the real world and the alien one converged. "Come on," I said, pressing the stud.

"No."

I couldn't stand it anymore. I grabbed her and wouldn't let go. She let fly with her free fist and got me in the nose. I felt the blood trickle but couldn't feel any pain. I was angry at them for brainwashing her into this ridiculous cult, I was angry at her for not

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coming with me like destiny had clearly intended–

I got hold of both her wrists. We were precariously near the edge. She kneed me in the stomach. I felt a dull ache, then more anger. I let go and grabbed her whole body tight, shaking her.

"Selfish bastard!" she screamed.

"I'm only trying to save you–"

She wrenched herself again and I held on tight and the string round her waist broke and the doll went sailing off into the void–

She stared after it, then broke away from me and bawled.

It was easy for me to hold on to her and lead her away. She didn't struggle at all. Now I was only angry at myself. Couldn't I do anything right? We stepped onto the first slidewalk and I held on to her hand, and she sobbed without stopping and I felt sick with self-recrimination and desire.

We made it to my suite at the Gaza Plaza and she went straight to the cathartic booth to vacuum off the paint. She stepped out wearing one of my artfur tunics. Her eyes were quite dry now, and blazing.

"All right," she said very quietly, "Mr. Rich Man. You've kidnapped me, made me break the pact, and you're probably about to offer me a pile of money in exchange for my services as a companion, or something. But you can't keep me here. You don't have the right."

God! She was more beautiful to me than any of my shallow friends. She *was* a dream come true, literally. I had to make her see reason, I had to show her she couldn't go on like that. "Please," I said, "just stay a little while longer, will you?"

She didn't answer me, but moved and sat down on a chairfloat. After a while she said, "I haven't got all the time in the universe, you know. Make your sales pitch so I can leave."

So I told her everything about myself. I told her about the way she had appeared to me in the middle of my clavichrome playing, how I had become driven by the vision of her . . . I went on and on. I think I started to tell about my school and about how Dad didn't love me but just sent me gobs and gobs of money and expected gratitude. I think I cried. I don't know.

At the end of it she was as cold as ever, and I was as hopelessly in love as ever.

Finally she said: "You talk very well, Julian. But you never once showed that you thought of me as a human being. You fell in love with a thing in your machine, without knowing who I was or anything. And I don't love you, I love Yitsakh. I believe in him."

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"You're lying!" I shouted. "You can't believe all that rubbish. You know you're not going to be reborn in the real universe among the stars when you die–you're just going to snuff out, like a self-lighting candle from the cathedral."

"Yeah, whatever," she said. She got up to leave–

"Wait!" I said.

We once did mythology in school. I remembered a tale retold by someone called Homer, a science fiction writer from the Dark Ages. It was called Orpheus and Eurydice and it was about this singer who brought back his lover from the dead–in the days before optional-reversibility death, I mean–I remembered that he could sing so well that the very stones would weep.

Well, maybe if I played the clavichrome to her–

Damn it, I knew I was the best clavichrome player in the solar system. All my teachers and all my friends had told me so.

"Just wait a while longer," I said. "Let me play to you, let me show you how I really love you . . ."

"You're pathetic," she said. But she sat down again.

I took a long time hooking up on purpose, just so I could look at the way she sat. In spite of her shouting at me just moments before, she was perfectly composed now. If I played to her I could swing it, maybe. Then I knew I could. After all, I was Julian barJulian XIII, and I *always* got everything I wanted.

So I started to improvise, watching her face the whole time.

I had to impress her, so I picked *Light on the Sound* again. That ill-fated piece . . .

I started at a steady tempo, not wanting to make a mistake. I didn't use the psifi; I was still too scared from the first time I'd tried it. But I was vain enough to turn on the recording box (when not in use, my clavichrome doubled as recorder, message-storer, mini-comp) and to program the most dazzling, ambitious color-sequence into the keyboard that I knew.

I threw every interpretational trick I knew into the performance. I had extra arabesquing light-columns that rose and snapped, and filigrees of purple sparklers running in and out of them, and I whipped up the four-note ostinato until it segued into the big thundering section with the keening twitter of high notes fireworking over chord-clusters that crashed in tandem with oceanwaves of blue light. I had inverted thunderbolts straining for the pointed ceiling. I had veils that fell one by one until it was a mist over the console, and when I got to the brilliant final section I couldn't see my own fingers. . . .

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The final echo died out and I turned to her, expecting applause.

She laughed at me.

"You have fantastic technique," she said at last. "But the way you play is just typical of your kind. You're showing off everything you've got. I didn't feel a thing when you played. . . ."

"No!" I cried out, knowing underneath it all that every word of it was true–I brought my hands crashing onto the keyboard and a horrible jangle of sounds mixed with supernova dirty mud colors exploded across the room.

"Don't you see," she said, "why I prefer my world to yours?"

"Your world is fake!"

"I won't make the obvious rejoinder. . . ."

"Damn it . . . this clavichrome is real, real, real!" I banged my fist on it and another volley of discords burst forth.

"Julian, your playing is very pretty, but it isn't real at all. You haven't lived near death the way all of *us* have. You've done everything, but you've experienced nothing! When you become a real artist, you won't play that way anymore. You'll show off when the piece requires it, and you'll build simple shapes as well as complicated ones. Julian, I really like you. I want you to know that."

She had a big heart, that girl. I realized how dumb all my pretensions had been, how I didn't even deserve to have her scolding me like this. But I still hoped–

"Will you stay a while here?" I said. "I'll put a megacred in an account in your name so you won't have to steal, I'll do anything you say, I'll relearn the clavichrome the way you tell me to."

She smiled.

It was the kind of smile that would unfreeze the rings of Saturn. I called for a comsim and made the credit transfer. She didn't look the whole time I was doing it.

And then she yielded to me, but never giving any of her real self. I knew her mind was on other things. And the next morning she was gone, and the clavichrome had the light on that showed a message tape stuck in it.

I sat down and she materialized in the empty air.

"Julian–" she said. "Thanks for the money. By the time you scan this I will have signed a tight, irreversible-death contract with THE WAY OUT Corp. No bribe you can give them will bring me back. I'll be in a million pieces. I do like you, Julian, but I'm loyal to my word. . . .

"All of *us* who have known Yitsakh have sworn to uphold his vision. We don't know if it's true or not. We just know that we love

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him. We all came from broken homes, we all ran away to big, anonymous Mallworld because of intolerable situations; and Yitsakh gave us a new dream, something bigger than ourselves. If I didn't follow through with the pact, I think Yitsakh would be unbearably hurt.

"Goodbye, Julian."

I reached over to turn the thing off. I didn't burst out crying. I didn't rush into paroxysms of grief. I felt alienated, outside myself. Remembering the previous night and thinking of her . . . as particles of dust flung out in the loneliness of space.

But the tape wasn't quite over.

"I almost forgot, Julian–there's a story I have to tell you before I go. It might help explain a little better some of the cruel things I said.

"Once upon a time there was a very rich man. He had one son he didn't care for much; the son was four years old and precocious, but very self-involved and didn't give anything to the father. So he decided to try again. He went to Storkways Inc. and ordered a baby–the most classically beautiful baby he could imagine. But there was an error in the manufacture, and the baby was born blind. The father rejected it at once and vowed to order no more babies.

"Human compassion being what it is, they did not pulp the child. He grew up in the hidden places of Mallworld, and instead of seeing the world around him made visions out of nothingness. He survived . . .

"His father's name was Julian barJulian the twelfth, Julian. Yitsakh is your brother."

And then Letisha faded from my life.

I sat at the clavichrome console for a very long time. I thought I would cry but I didn't. This was too *big* to cry about. I'd cried often enough in my short life, mostly to get something I wanted. Or thought I wanted. I'd cried when my first clavichrome didn't have all the buttons I wanted. I got the extra buttons. I'd cried at the paltry size of my uncountable allowance. I got that too.

I wouldn't get *this.*

I couldn't have had it even if Letisha were . . . were . . .

And all the new things I learnt about whirled round in my head, undoing all the ingrained thought patterns, wrenching everything apart. I saw the huge empty void between the skins of Mallworld, with the echoes whispershifting over spirals of steel; I saw the holoZeiss projection on the school bus with the ghosts of the stars superimposed on the emptiness of our pocket universe; I saw Yitsakh's starry vision; I saw Letisha's face and how she loved someone

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enough to die just for the integrity of his vision; and I saw the empty purple eyes of Yitsakh, my rejected brother, who could have been just like me and was one of *them* instead, one of the outcasts . . . the eyes that could not see me saw right through me, right to the heart of what men desire.

I knew that I had to build something to replace the shattered patterns of the past. . . .

And all the images began to crystallize into a complete thought. Simplicity, I thought. A simple, pure statement. Something so obvious that we've all completely overlooked it.

The thought came together all at once.

I set the clavichrome controls so that the waverange of the color blue was spread out over the entire twelve octaves, in infinitesimal gradations. Quickly I hooked up and then turned on the recorder and printer so I could have a score.

I started with a single pure note, no overtones at all, and a single line of blue light. Just a simple idea. The note grew on either side into a slow cluster; and the blue light grew too, very slowly, until the whole air was singing with blues, ceruleans, aquamarines, ultramarines, turquoises, moving imperceptibly from one to the other and shifting in slow waves . . . time stood almost still. Gradually a heartbeat sound became audible, a faint throb that intensified the stillness.

I wasn't thinking about me anymore, not about Letisha, not about our brief relationship. I was thinking a little about Yitsakh's vision and about how mankind would be free one day. About how each of us has a little piece of the truth inside themselves, how shallowness and stupidity could hide it . . . I made the whole room around me into a deep blue sky; and I made the music deep and raging, but understated. And then I planted a star in the dark blue and counterpointed a new, very simple theme in the treble, still using pure tones without overtones; and then I added another star and another, and more kinds of blue, and stars that did not move but just glittered quietly; and then I made all the keyboards burst out in song, building a fugue out of the simple treble theme and throwing star after star into the sky until the deep blue heaven blazed with men's dreams.

It's my most famous piece.

I don't even have to tell you its name, you've all recognized it from the description. Maybe some of you have kids who are struggling through it–it's not very hard technically.

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I've told my story now. I guess I tricked you. I tricked myself too: when I started off I thought it'd be a brief, light, humorous intro and then I'd launch into one of my showy pieces–and I've written hundreds of those. I've written a lot of better pieces than that first breakthrough into art, too; but you know how whimsical the public's fancy is. Hell, you *are* the public.

I hope you're still with me, out there.

You know I often wonder what happens to those wild children when they grow up. I still see them sometimes, turning a corner, stepping out of a booth–sometimes I swear it's Yitsakh. But he probably is middle-aged now, if he hasn't succumbed to his own visions. . . .

I'm going to play the song now, and I hope it helps you to see Yitsakh's dream. I hope you'll dream it with me, until the day the Selespridar open the universe to us again. Until we're free.

Enough already. Well . . .

I guess I'm ready to start.

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THE BACKWARD BANANA
by Martin Gardner

Backward, turn backward, O time, in your flight.
Make me a child again just for tonight!
—Elizabeth Akers Allen

Professor N.A. Gilligan and his assistants, Bianca Zacnaib and Duane Renaud, had been working for years on a device they hoped could reverse time inside a small region of space. Their method is much too technical to put in laymen's language, but essentially it involves a reversal of the spin of Penrose twistors—mathematical structures that underlie quarks. Twistors had been proposed in the mid-twentieth century by the British mathematical physicist Roger Penrose, and their existence was confirmed in 1991 by a series of ingenious experiments.

Gilligan's device was slightly larger than a washing machine. A compartment at the top, supercooled and surrounded by a powerful Penrose force field, was designed to hold any physical object that the experimenters intended to time-reverse. On the side of the machine were twenty levers, their positions numbered 1 through 20. Pulling up on a lever closed a position, pushing down opened it.

"At last we are ready for a test," said Gilligan, his eyes gleaming. "Let's first use a small organic object, say a lemon. If we succeed, we'll try to time-reverse a watermelon. Then maybe a mouse."

"No lemons, no melon," said Bianca, "but we do have a banana in the refrigerator."

"Banana it is," said Gilligan.

Bianca fetched the ripe yellow banana. She carefully placed it inside the compartment and closed the lid.

"Are all positions closed?" asked Gilligan.

"No, it is open on one position—position two," said Duane. "Shall I close two?"

"Not yet," said Gilligan, walking around the machine to inspect the row of levers. He pushed down lever seven, adjusted several dials, then pressed a button that turned on the machine. It began to hum.

Gilligan hooked a finger under lever seven while Duane kept a finger below lever two. "Pull up if I pull up," said Gilligan.

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Gilligan waited a few minutes before he slowly raised his lever. Duane did the same. "Bianca, as I move these levers," said Duane, "I'm so excited my hand is shaking."

Bianca raised the lid for a quick peek. The banana had already turned green.

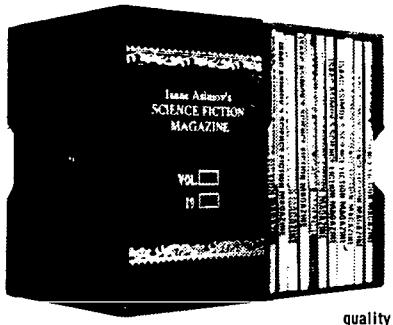
The hum grew steadily louder, then suddenly there was an explosive sound, like a tiny thunderclap, inside the compartment. When Bianca opened it again, the banana was gone.

"By Albert, we've done it!" shouted Gilligan.

The three physicists broke open a bottle of wine, drank several toasts, sang a chorus of *Yes, We Have No Bananas,* then went to Gilligan's office to prepare their report on the great experiment.

Did you notice that in the above episode the names of all three scientists are palindromes? That is, the order of letters in each name is the same when the letters are taken in the reverse direction.

Concealed in the text are three other palindromic word sequences that spell the same backward. One contains just four words, one contains six, and one contains seven. If you can't find them, turn to page 91.



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ON VARIATIONS ON A ROBOT

by James Gunn

art: Alex Schomburg

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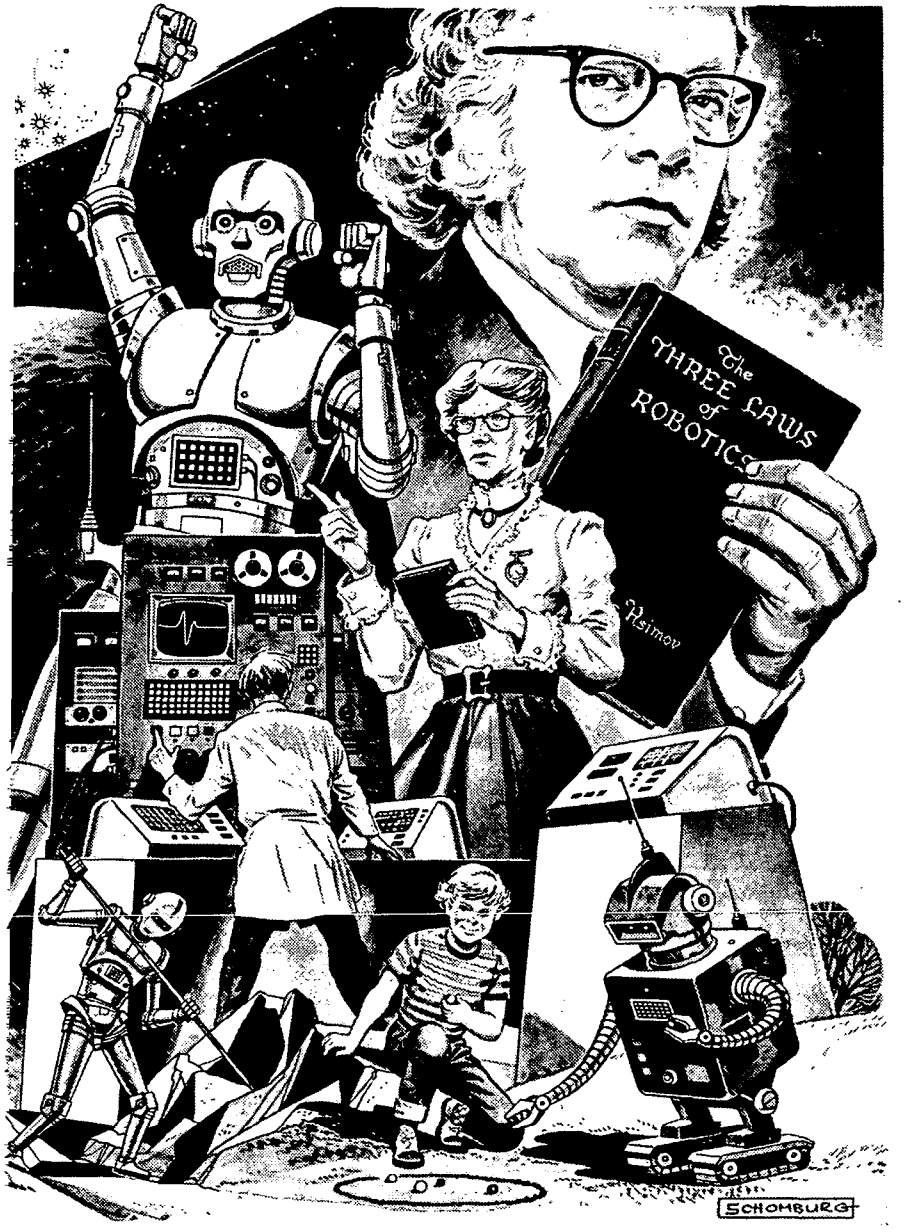

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Professor Gunn has been writing science fiction since 1948 and has long since established himself as one of the field's perennial talents. Among his most acclaimed works are The Immortals, The Joy Makers, *and* The Listeners. *His novel,* The Dreamers, *will be out soon from Simon & Schuster.* The Road to Science Fiction #3: from Heinlein to Here *is the latest of a series of critical & historical anthologies he has edited for Mentor. The article which follows is from a book on Dr. Asimov's fiction which will be published by Oxford University Press shortly. All this demonstrates splendidly that the best critics of science fiction are frequently the leading writers of science fiction.*

Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* has become one of the enduring titles in the developing canon of contemporary science fiction, and Asimov's robot stories were one of the two basic kinds of fiction with which he built his early reputation. The other was the Foundation stories brought together in *The Foundation Trilogy*. Like the *Trilogy*, the book *I, Robot* has seldom been out of print since its 1950 publication by Gnome Press. It has sold several million copies in hardcover and paperback, and has elicited persistent interest from filmmakers, the most recent incident of which resulted in a script by Harlan Ellison that suffered the usual Hollywood complications.

Asimov did not stop writing robot stories after the publication of *I, Robot,* as he did with the Foundation stories after the publication of the *Trilogy*. Another group of stories was published by Doubleday in 1964 as *The Rest of the Robots,* including three stories that were written early in Asimov's career but were published in magazines other than *Astounding,* and Asimov did not think them suitable for inclusion in *I, Robot.* The remainder of the eight stories in *The Rest of the Robots* were published after 1950. Since then Asimov has continued to return to his consideration of the robots as new ideas have occurred to him or editors have requested new robot stories.

In all, Asimov has written twenty-nine robot stories, some of which are mere finger exercises but others of which add significantly to the intellectual and emotional consideration of the robot that

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Asimov began in 1939. In fact, considering Doubleday's apparent determination to bring all of Asimov's fiction back into print, it may now be time for an edition of robot stories that will bring them all—or at least all the significant stories—under one cover. Perhaps it might be called *All Us Robots*.

Asimov's interest in robots and his readers' interests in Asimov's robots provide useful insights into how science fiction was changing in the 1940s under the influence of the new editor at *Astounding*, John W. Campbell. For one thing the fiction began to reflect science as it was practiced then and might be practiced in the future, and scientists as they really were or might become.

In the introduction to *The Rest of the Robots* Asimov wrote:

> . . . one of the stock plots of science fiction was that of the invention of a robot—usually pictured as a creature of metal, without soul or emotion. Under the influence of the well-known deeds and ultimate fate of Frankenstein and Rossum, there seemed only one change to be rung on this plot. —Robots were created and destroyed their creator; robots were created and destroyed their creator; robots were created and destroyed their creator—
>
> In the 1930s I became a science-fiction reader and I quickly grew tired of this dull, hundred-times-told tale. As a person interested in science, I resented the purely Faustian interpretation of science.

Asimov went on to point out that nothing is made without taking into account the dangers involved: knives have hilts, stairs have bannisters, electrical wiring has insulation, pressure cookers have safety valves. "Sometimes the safety achieved is insufficient because of limitations imposed by the nature of the universe or the nature of the human mind. However, the effort is there."

If a robot is considered as another artifact, Asimov reasoned, engineers will build-in safeguards. And so he began to write robot stories—but of a new variety. "My robots were machines designed by engineers, not pseudo-men created by blasphemers. My robots reacted along rational lines that existed in their 'brains' from the moment of construction."

Asimov's robot stories represent one of the longest continuous considerations of that phenomenon, or perhaps of any fictional phenomenon, lasting as it has from the time of the writing of "Robbie" in 1939 to the time of publication of "The Bicentennial Man" in

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1976; and perhaps it is not over yet. That span has allowed Asimov to consider robots in many different ways (and for the scholar to consider how Asimov's attitudes and ideas have changed); but the manner in which the stories were created also inhibits the scholar from considering, except in the most general sense, the stories as a unified whole. They were created individually, and they must be considered individually. Each builds upon earlier stories, and all share certain assumptions; but each was created without consideration for its place in any overall scheme. In fact, the best way to think about them may be as variations upon a theme.

The beginning, and the book basic to the entire series of stories, was *I, Robot*. The title represents an initial irony, since it is also the title of a story by Eando Binder (which was a pseudonym of Earl and Otto Binder, used after 1940 by Otto alone); and it was the publication of Binder's story in *Amazing* for January 1939 and a chance meeting with Otto on May 7 of the same year at the Queens Science Fiction League that inspired Asimov's first robot story. In 1950, when Martin Greenberg of Gnome Press was preparing to publish the book, Greenberg dismissed Asimov's suggested title, *Mind and Iron* (a phrase used in the introduction), and suggested *I, Robot*.

Asimov said that was impossible because of Binder's earlier story. "F--- Eando Binder," Greenberg said, and *I, Robot* it was. Asimov credits the title with helping sell the book. As a further irony, the book contains no first-person robot stories—nor did Asimov ever publish any.

The book contains nine stories united not only by their concern with robots but also by that introduction and a continuing narrative between stories constructed as an interview, by a reporter for Interplanetary Press, with Susan Calvin when she reaches the age of seventy-five. It also functions as an account of the difficulties and successes of United States Robots and Mechanical Men, Inc. (hereafter abbreviated as USR) and a history of robotics itself, since Calvin joined USR as a robopsychologist upon earning her Ph.D. in cybernetics. In the process of bringing the stories together and providing the glue that sticks them together, Asimov provided a kind of chronology that was missing from the original version of the stories:

1982: Susan Calvin is born. The same year Lawrence Robertson founds USR.
1996: "Robbie" is constructed as a non-speaking robot and sold to

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the Weston family as a nursemaid for Gloria.

1998: "Robbie" ("Strange Playfellow"), *Super Science Stories,* September 1940. New York passes curfew law for robots.

2002: Dr. Alfred Lanning demonstrates a mobile, speaking robot (intended for the mines of Mercury) in a psycho-math seminar. Susan Calvin is present.

2003: Calvin earns bachelor's degree.

2003-2007: Use of robots is banned on Earth because of opposition by labor unions and fundamentalist religious groups.

2007: Calvin earns her Ph.D. and joins USR as "the first great practitioner of a new art," robopsychology. Lanning is director of research. USR has hit a financial low-point and is forced to turn to the extra-terrestrial market. Robots are about twelve feet tall, clumsy, and not much good.[1]

Circa 2007: The First Mercury Expedition. Robots try to help build the mining station there but the effort fails.

Teens and Twenties: Gregory Powell and Michael Donovan handle most of the difficult robotics cases.

2015: "Runaround," *Astounding,* March 1942. The Second Mercury Expedition. USR has developed a new type of robot, SPD-13 ("Speedy").

2015: "Reason," *Astounding,* April 1941. USR has developed a new kind of robot, QT-1 ("Cutie"), to direct energy beams from sun to earth from solar stations.

2016: "Catch That Rabbit," *Astounding,* February 1944. USR has developed a master robot, DV-5 ("Davie"), which controls six sub-robots, for asteroid mining.

2021: "Liar!," *Astounding,* May 1941. USR creates a robot, RB-34 ("Herbie"), which has the accidental ability to read minds.

2029: "Little Lost Robot," *Astounding,* March 1947. Work is progressing (in a station situated in the asteroid belt) on a hyperatomic drive for interstellar travel. USR creates an experimental group of robots, NS-2 ("Nestors"), some of which are not impressioned with the entire First Law of Robotics so that they can work with scientists who are involved in dangerous research.

2032: "Evidence," *Astounding,* September 1946. Humanoid robots are possible and may have been constructed.

2052: "The Evitable Conflict," *Astounding,* June 1950. The world is unified under a "World Coordinator," and the world's economy is entirely under the control of giant computers called "The Machines."

2064: Susan Calvin dies.

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Little more information than that sketched in above is provided about the world in which *I, Robot* exists, because little more is necessary for the understanding of the basic narrative. That narrative is about robots and the problems people have with them in spite of the precautions that engineers have taken in their construction. The most important precaution, and probably the single most important contribution to the success of the robot stories, was the Three Laws of Robotics.

Asimov was not the first to write about robots. As he points out in *The Rest of the Robots*, Homer, in the *Iliad,* describes Hephaestus as being served by maidens he has created from gold as mechanical thinking creatures. But there were other robot predecessors: Talos, the bull-headed man made of bronze, who guarded Crete for King Minos; a Golem, molded of clay by various medieval rabbis[2] and animated by a "shem" or name of God; Roger Bacon's talking brazen head; Mary Shelley's Frankenstein's monster (1818); and Karel Capek's robots in his 1921 play *R.U.R.* (Rossum's Universal Robots), which introduced the Czech word for worker into the English language. But every robot up to Asimov's time, virtually without exception, turned against its creator; and it was this tradition against which Asimov was rebelling. The trend had turned, however, even before Asimov's first robot story. Binder's robot, Adam Link, was a noble creature moved by a strong sense of honor and love. His brain was constructed of "iridium sponge," that of Asimov's robots, "a spongy globe of platinumiridium." Even earlier, Lester del Rey's "Helen O'Loy," published in *Astounding* in December 1938, described a robot created as so much like a person that she falls in love and eventually makes her owner an ideal wife. And Binder's "Adam Link" stories—a total of ten of them—continued to appear in *Amazing* throughout 1939, 1940, 1941, and 1942 (seven of them were collected in *Adam Link—Robot*, published by Paperback Library in 1965). In at least one of them, "Adam Link's Vengeance," published in February 1940, the robot thinks, "A robot must never kill a human, of his own free will."

No doubt there are other robot predecessors, and even other stories in which resemblances to *I, Robot* are clear; but it is not my purpose in citing them to detract from Asimov's accomplishments—only to point out debts that he is quick to acknowledge (though he may not realize the full extent of them; a magnificent memory may not always be an asset, for Asimov occasionally discovered, to his horror in the case of "Green Patches," that he was reworking someone else's idea). As a matter of fact, when Asimov showed "Robbie" to

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his friend and fellow Futurian, Frederik Pohl, the young Pohl, already functioning as an agent, told him that Campbell would reject it because it was too reminiscent of "Helen O'Loy." *Amazing* rejected it as well, because it was too similar to "I, Robot," which they had published just six months before (and must have had Binder's "The Trial of Adam Link" already in type for the July issue). Eventually Pohl himself published "Robbie" in *Super Science Stories*.

No matter what its publication problems, "Robbie" set up many of the conflicts that pervaded the later book and even the entire series of robot stories. The Westons bought Robbie as a nursemaid for their daughter Gloria because, as her mother said, "It was a novelty; it took a load off me, and—and it was a fashionable thing to do." Two years later, however, Mrs. Weston wanted to sell the robot back to the company because, "She won't play with anyone else"; "I won't have my daughter entrusted to a machine—and I don't care how clever it is. It has no soul, and no one knows what it may be thinking. A child just isn't made to be guarded by a thing of metal"; and ". . . something might go wrong. . . . Some little jigger will come loose and the awful thing will go berserk. . . ." George Weston protests: "A robot is infinitely more to be trusted than a human nursemaid. . . . Robbie was constructed for only one purpose really—to be the companion of a little child. His entire 'mentality' has been created for the purpose. He just can't help being faithful and loving and kind. He's a machine—*made so*. That's more than you can say for humans." Nevertheless, he surrenders to his wife's persistence, only to reunite the inconsolable Gloria with Robbie at the end.

Other problems run through the robot series: 1) human resentment of robots (Asimov calls it "the Frankenstein complex") and the difficulties of introducing robots on Earth; 2) what is good for people; 3) the difficulties of giving a robot unambiguous instructions; 4) the distinctions between robots and between robots and people, and the difficulties in telling them apart; 5) the superiority of robots to people; but also 6) the superiority of people to robots.

Asimov rearranged the order of the stories when they were published in *I, Robot*; he also made some small editorial changes for consistency. "Reason," for instance, is placed third in the book, although it was written and published second, before the codification of the Three Laws. It is clear that this is true from internal evidence, as well: in spite of interpolated references to the First and Second Laws, Cutie, "the first robot who's ever exhibited curiosity as to his own existence," refuses to obey orders given him by Donovan and

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Powell, breaking what turns out to be the Second Law. Donovan and Powell even display some concern that he will break what turns out to be the First Law.

Pleased by the appearance of "Strange Playfellow" ("Robbie") in print, Asimov decided to "push [Campbell's] buttons" by putting a religious motif into a robot story, and Campbell responded as Asimov had hoped, asking for Asimov to write the story for him and buying it immediately. It was the first Asimov robot story to appear in *Astounding*. "Reason" incorporated two of Campbell's editorial preferences: a philosophic concern with religion—Cutie deduces by "pure reason" that he could not have been constructed by such inferior beings as Donovan and Powell but must have been created by the most powerful thing around, the energy converter, which he therefore reasons to be a god—and a pragmatic conclusion. When Cutie handles the energy beam perfectly, even through an "electron" storm, the two engineers decide to leave him with his delusion and even to ship other QT models to the station to be indoctrinated with the religious belief that works so well.

"Liar," the third robot story written by Asimov, incorporated the Three Laws of Robotics[3] for the first time.[4] Campbell suggested them during the discussion that preceded the writing of the story, and Asimov codified them:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.

Typically, Asimov has always insisted that Campbell originated the laws, and Campbell always said that they were implicit in Asimov's stories and discussions.

Whatever the exact truth of origin, the Three Laws, as Asimov noted in his autobiography, "revolutionized science fiction":

> Once they were established in a series of stories, they made so much sense and proved so popular with the readers that other writers began to use them. They couldn't quote them directly, of course, but they could simply assume their existence, knowing well that the readers would be acquainted with the Laws and would understand the assumption.

Campbell may have worked more intuitively than through conscious

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theory, but this was what he wanted: a rational inspection of all premises; a movement away from traditional responses, primarily emotional and irrational, toward pragmatism; and the construction of new and more logical systems of operation.

Campbell, as a writer, also may have perceived the fictional opportunities the laws of robotics would provide. As Asimov noted in *The Rest of the Robots,* "There was just enough ambiguity in the Three Laws to provide the conflicts and uncertainties required for new stories, and, to my great relief, it seemed always to be possible to think up a new angle out of the sixty-one words of the Three Laws."

The Asimov robot stories as a whole may respond best to an analysis on this basis: the ambiguity in the Three Laws and the ways in which Asimov played twenty-nine variations upon a theme. The importance to the evolution of science fiction, at least in the period between 1940 and 1950, was that this was an intellectual development. The emotional response—the fear of the machine, the fear of the creature turning on its creator—was derided. In the robot stories such responses are characteristic of foolish, unthinking people; religious fantatics; short-sighted labor unions. The Frankenstein complex may be observably true to human nature (this truth, along with the appeal of the Frankenstein complex to human fears of change and the unknown, may explain its persistence in literature), but the Frankenstein complex was false to humanity's intellectual aspirations to be rational and to build rationally. Blind emotion, sentimentality, prejudice, faith in the impossible, unwillingness to accept observable truth, failure to use one's intellectual capacities or the resources for discovering the truth that are available—these were the evils that Campbell and Asimov saw as the sources of human misery. They could be dispelled, they thought, though always with difficulty and never completely, by exposure to ridicule and the clear, cool voice of reason.

"Robbie," for instance, considers the question of unreasoning opposition to robots: Grace Weston's concern about Robbie, the villagers' fear of him, New York's curfew for robots. Mrs. Weston, who herself has an unreasoning determination to get rid of Robbie, says, "People aren't reasonable about these things." The climax of the story—Robbie moves swiftly to save Gloria from being run down by a tractor—makes clear the advantages of the robot's singleminded concern for its function and its instantaneous response to a crisis that paralyzes Gloria's parents for vital split-seconds.

"Runaround" is an exercise in the conflict between two of the

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three laws. Speedy, a valuable new robot designed for use in the mines of Mercury, has been ordered to get silenium from a pool. But he is found circling the pool acting drunk, and it turns out that carbon monoxide released by volcanic activity in the area can combine with iron to form volatile iron carbonyl. At a certain point Speedy's instinct for self-preservation (the Third Law) exactly balances the necessity to obey orders (the Second Law); Powell is able to break Speedy out of his deadly circle only by placing himself in danger so that Speedy must rescue him (the First Law).

Many of the stories develop from unforeseen consequences of the creation of new robots (sometimes complicated by inaccurate or unspecific orders, as in "Runaround"); others come about through accident. Both stem naturally from Asimov's premise: unforeseen consequences or accidents are eventualities that rational persons cannot guard against.

"Catch that Rabbit" develops from unforeseen consequences: a master robot with six sub-robots is created for asteroid mining but occasionally malfunctions when not watched and cannot remember why. It turns out that six sub-robots are too many for Davie to handle in an emergency. When Donovan and Powell discover this, partly by accident, they are able to pinpoint the affected part of Davie's positronic brain—the part that is stressed by a six-way order.

"Liar" begins with the accidental creation of a telepathic robot, Herbie. Herbie is asked to tell each of the characters what he has learned from reading other characters' minds, and because he cannot "harm" them, he tells them what they want to hear; particularly plain, spinsterish Susan Calvin that the man she loves, Milton Ashe, is in love with her. When they all discover that Herbie has been lying to them, Susan drives Herbie insane by forcing on him the paradox that no matter what he does he will be hurting someone.

"Little Lost Robot" brings in another element, the search for a hyperatomic (interstellar) drive at a base in the asteroids. A new kind of robot, the Nestor series, has been created to work with scientists in dangerous situations from which ordinary robots would pull the scientists to safety. Some have not been impressioned, therefore, with the entire First Law; and one of them was told by an irritated scientist to get lost. The variation Asimov dealt with here was: under what conditions would the First Law have to be relaxed; the answer was: when robots had to discriminate between dangers. When the Nestor hides among identical robots and refuses to reveal himself, Susan Calvin attempts to force him into the open by placing a man in danger. At first all the robots spring to save the man; in

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a second, slightly different experiment, they all remain seated, having been convinced by the hiding Nestor that the attempt to save the man could not succeed and the robots would only destroy themselves. In a final test, Susan places herself in danger and the malfunctioning Nestor reveals itself by recognizing that harmless infrared rays rather than dangerous gamma rays were involved and, in its feeling of superiority, forgetting that the other robots had not been trained, as he had, to tell the difference.

"Escape" involves computers rather than robots, but the problems are the same: in this case, how can a robot (computer) be forced to solve a problem if the solution might involve the death of a human being? Such a conflict with the First Law has, apparently, burned out the computer of a competitor, Consolidated Robots[5], which approaches USR to hire its computer to solve a problem, probably concerning the development of an interstellar hyperatomic or space-warp drive. USR's computer, called "The Brain," incorporates USR's patented emotional brain paths and operates on a childlike, "idiot-savant" level. The ship that it builds turns out to "kill" the occupants (Donovan and Powell) but only temporarily while they are in the space-warp. The emotional imbalance, however, turns the Brain into a practical joker.

"Evidence" presents another problem in discrimination: in "Little Lost Robot" the question was how to detect one of a group of identical robots when that one has been instructed in the strongest terms to get lost; in "Evidence" the question is how to tell a humanoid robot from a human when the individual in question stands on his rights as a presumptive human. Stephen Byerley, accused by political opponents of being a robot, is running for mayor. The evidence is presented: no one has seen Byerley sleep or eat. But this is not proof that he does not. He refuses to be searched or X-rayed, and wears a device that protects him against X-rays attempted by subterfuge. He practices as a district attorney but does not actually condemn convicted criminals to death. The Asimovian touch is contained in the fact that he is a good district attorney, a good man, and would make a good mayor. When asked if robots are so different from men, mentally, Susan Calvin says, "Worlds different. Robots are essentially decent." At the climactic moment of the campaign, Byerley strikes a heckler, something a robot would be unable to do. But after the election Susan Calvin notes that it would have been possible for him to strike a robot made up to look human.

"The Evitable Conflict," the final story in *I, Robot,* concludes the saga of the robots—for their first decade at least—by dealing with

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the question of robot superiority and the ambiguity in the First Law about what constitutes harm—or good. The Machines, which have become too complex for humans to understand, have taken over the running of the world's economy; for the first time in human history the economy is running smoothly except for a few small problems here and there. These, however, should not happen, and they worry World Coordinator Stephen Byerley. He tells Susan Calvin about his investigation. One by one they discard hypotheses: that the Machines are being given wrong data or that their instructions are being ignored. Wrong data or sabotage (by the anti-robot Society for Humanity) simply becomes part of the data for the next problem and is taken into account by the Machines. The small inefficiencies, they finally decide, have been caused by the Machines themselves as they shake loose those few persons who cling to the side of the boat for purposes the Machines consider harmful to humanity. The Machines are acting for the ultimate good of the human species, which only the Machines know, or can know. Mankind has lost any voice in its own future; but then, if one considers the uncontrolled swings of the economy when it was in the hands of humans and the seemingly inevitable conflicts that accompanied them, humanity never had any control. For all time now, all conflicts are finally evitable. Only the Machines are inevitable.

One might contrast this attitude toward the omniscient and omnipotent machine with Jack Williamson's treatment of the same theme in "With Folded Hands," which appeared three years before "The Evitable Conflict" and may have been on Asimov's mind. Indeed, the title of Asimov's story might refer to Williamson's conclusion about his "humanoids," who do everything for humanity and leave mankind with nothing to do but sit with folded hands. "The Evitable Conflict" provides two major differences with "With Folded Hands": the Machines not only control human affairs better than humans but humanity never has been "free" and the Machines do not let humanity know it is no longer in control.

This account of the stories that make up *I, Robot* gives only a hint of the qualities that make the stories, and the book, persistently appealing. Except for two stories—"Liar" and "Evidence"—they are not stories in which character plays a significant part. Virtually all plot develops in conversation with little if any action. Nor is there a great deal of local color or description of any kind. The dialogue is, at best, functional and the style is, at best, transparent.

At times, as in the climactic moment in which Susan Calvin tor-

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ments Herbie into insanity with her paradox, Asimov's unadorned language rises to the demands placed upon it by the narrative; but mostly it lies passively, transparently, and unambiguously between the reader and the story. While it seldom adds much to the enjoyment of the story, it seldom detracts either—unless the reader demands something that Asimov and the story are unprepared to give.

The robot stories—and, as a matter of fact, almost all Asimov fiction—play themselves on a relatively bare stage. The reader perceives only those stage properties that are essential to the plot, and those only in general details. Mercury, the closest planet to the sun and the scene of "Runaround," could have called forth descriptions of the unique qualities of that unusual planet (and has in stories by other authors); but it is presented in terms of only heat and brightness: "The sunlight came down in a white-hot wash and played liquidly around them." The reader is denied even a description of the silenium pool, whatever *that* might be. Solar Station #5, in "Reason," exists only in terms of words, such as "officer's room," "control room," and "engine room." So it is with the rest of the stories.

The characters in the robot stories fill the requirements for what they must do and little more. Gloria's attachment for Robbie and Robbie's faithful dedication to Gloria make them a pleasantly sentimental pair, but Gloria's parents are only stock parents: the foolish but determined mother and the sympathetic but susceptible father. Unless readers pay close attention in the Powell and Donovan stories, they may find it difficult to remember that Powell is English and logical, Donovan is Irish and impulsive—the use of such pairs (as well as larger groupings of friends and colleagues) had become conventional by now in science fiction; and Asimov uses an almost identical pair later in his juveniles, in Lucky Starr and Bigman.

The antagonists, where such exist, are seldom characterized at all. The employees of USR begin to assume greater life: Robertson, Lanning, Bogert, and finally Susan Calvin herself. The closer the characters work with robots the more interesting characteristics they accumulate. Susan Calvin clearly became a favorite of Asimov; "as time went on," he wrote in *The Rest of the Robots,* "I fell in love with Dr. Calvin." She is plain, stiff, forbidding, unemotional, logical—"much more like the popular conception of a robot than any of my positronic creations," Asimov continued. She is a character much like Mr. Spock in *Star Trek* who became, accidentally one would assume, the catalyst for the popularity of that series. The reader comes to love Susan Calvin, too.

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But it is the robots who display the "infinite variety" that Shakespeare praised in Cleopatra: Robbie with his more than doglike devotion; the drunken Speedy, caught between imperatives; the arrogant Cutie, blinded by the brilliance of his own logic; the puzzled Davie; the tender Herbie; the Machiavellian Nestor; the childlike Brain; the coolly competent Stephen Byerley; and, in a lesser way because they never appear directly, the omniscient Machines. They all have names (again, excluding the Machines), and this is a concession not only to the human characteristic of naming its vehicles and machines but to the humanization of the robots. They capture our interest more than do the people—as they should. *I, Robot*, though never in the first person, is always about robots, and the characters' reactions to the problems that the robots bring with them create the stories.

Asimov never identifies with his robots, however. He gives them self-awareness and human characteristics so that the characters (and the readers) can better deal with the problems the robots present. Readers read the robot stories incorrectly when they begin to care more about what happens to the robots than what happens to the people—at least in the Asimovian universe. Asimov is a rational man, and rationally the robots are still machines: humans should no more become fixated on their endearing characteristics than they should fear their rebellion.

All of this, including the lack of action and the conversational mode by which the stories proceed ("The Evitable Conflict" consists entirely of a conversation between Byerley and Susan Calvin), is less important than the fact that each story exists as a puzzle to be solved; the delight of the reader is in the ingenuity with which Asimov's characters solve the puzzle. The robots exist to present the puzzle in their behavior; the characters exist to solve the puzzle. This view of Asimov's fiction may explain much of what has been discussed in the preceding few paragraphs: dialogue, for instance, is a vehicle for describing and then analyzing the problem, and clarity is its most important attribute (robots may have problems understanding human statements, but other humans do not, unless information is deliberately withheld, as in a story included in *The Rest of the Robots,* "Risk"); an emphasis on setting would imply a relevance to the outcome that would be misleading; a presentation of human variation would suggest that human differences are the subject, not robot differences. In spite of the fact that "Liar" and "Evidence," the stories in which character plays a more important part, clearly are the most effective stories in the book, equally clearly

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they are most effective because of the more-or-less accidental coming together of the Asimov method with a suitable subject. Susan Calvin's human reaction to Herbie's lies *is* the means by which the problem is solved and the question of Herbie disposed of. Stephen Byerley's ambiguous presence *is* the problem of robot superiority that must meet the test of human fear.

The other stories are less successful as fiction because Asimov does not find a humanly-involving method for expressing them. But even "Liar" and "Evidence"would be unsuccessful if it were not for the ingenuity of the solutions to the problems they present; the human problems solve the robot predicament. It is always so in the robot stories: Weston not only must get Robbie and Gloria back together again but must do so in a way that demonstrates Robbie's superiority as a nursemaid; Powell must get Speedie back but in a way exploiting the Three Laws. If readers do not enjoy solving the problems, they will find little else to enjoy in *I, Robot.*

As in the *The Foundation Trilogy,* Asimov discovered, or learned from Campbell, the method that best suited his rational temperament and that best developed the kind of ideas with which he wished to deal: the mystery. As a rational person in an irrational world, Asimov had a compulsion that fit in perfectly with what Campbell thought science fiction ought to do: that is, to show rationality prevailing over fear, prejudice, sentimentality, short-sightedness, and all the other irrational forces in the world. Thus the mystery; thus the puzzle; thus the success of the logical, unemotional Susan Calvin over all the other less logical, more emotional characters in the stories. "Robbie" was less successful (and less acceptable to Campbell, perhaps) partly because it was not a puzzle, not a mystery; "Reason" was Campbell's kind of story, and Asimov's too, because it presented the puzzle of Cutie's obsession and how to solve it, and the ending was a neat twist that had not been foreseen.

The puzzle and the ingenious solution—this is how Asimov's robot stories sold themselves to Campbell and to his readers. But this was not their only virtue; their concern with the Three Laws also had relevance, sometimes stated, more often not, to human behavior. This does not refer simply to the overt references to such matters as the Frankenstein complex: the fear of robots and the banning of their use on Earth has more fictional value than philosophic validity. Although clearly motivated by Asimov's dislike for the archetype and enabling him to deal with contrasts in attitudes and behavior, the terrestrial antipathy toward the robots seems less convincing than desirable for reasons of plot. Robot computers are

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not banned, nor are the other non-humanoid robots. The banning of the robots and apprehension concerning them, however, provides many conflicts in a series that has little inevitable conflict built into it. Asimov is able to get around the bans when he desires, particularly in the robot stories published after 1950.

More important are the philosophic implications of the Three Laws. In "Runaround," for instance, Speedie is in the position of a human who has been ordered to perform an important task but who discovers that doing it will endanger his life. A human might not exhibit his conflict in so neatly balanced a fashion, but the neatness of the circle exhibits an understanding of human nature that a soldier cowering in a shellhole might not. Cutie exhibits the characteristics of many prophets, finding his certitude in Platonic introspection rather than scientific evidence; and his analysis suggests to the reader, in passing, how improbable are the universe and life itself that we take for granted. According to a recent computer analysis reported in the *New York Times,* Dr. Michael H. Hart of Trinity University concluded that life on Earth, much less civilization, was so unlikely as to be virtually impossible.

By the time Asimov reached the writing of "Evidence," the comparisons had become overt. Susan Calvin points out:

> ". . . if you stop to think about it, the three Rules of Robotics are the essential guiding principles of a good many of the world's ethical systems. Of course, every human being is supposed to have the instinct of self-preservation. That's Rule Three to a robot. Also every 'good' human being, with a social conscience and a sense of responsibility, is supposed to defer to proper authority; to listen to his doctor, his boss, his government, his psychiatrist, his fellow man; to obey laws, to follow rules, to conform to custom—even when they interfere with his comfort or his safety. That's Rule Two to a robot. Also, every 'good' human being is supposed to love others as himself, protect his fellow man, risk his life to save another. That's Rule One to a robot. To put it simply—if Byerley follows all the Rules of Robotics, he may be a robot, and may simply be a very good man."

Clearly, as she herself states in the same story, Susan Calvin likes robots considerably better than human beings. By the end of the book, so may the reader.

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The story of the robots does not end here. Asimov has continued his exploration of the theme with three stories published in magazines other than *Astounding* in the 1940–50 period, and eighteen more scattered over the last nineteen years, some of them mere throwaways, others better than most if not all the stories in *I, Robot.* The first group of eight was published in *The Rest of the Robots* in 1964.

"Robot AL-76 Goes Astray," *Amazing,* February 1942, presents a confused robot: he is intended to work in the mines of the airless moon with a disintegrator (here called a Disinto); somehow he gets lost on Earth and makes a Disinto out of scrap and two flashlight batteries, only to be told by a frightened human to destroy it and forget about it completely. AL-76 is confused, but he is not as confused as the people who are afraid of him.

"Victory Unintentional," *Super Science Stories,* August 1942, is a sequel to "Not Final," an *Astounding* story that presented the threat of a teeming, xenophobic civilization on Jupiter. Here a robot expedition lands on Jupiter. The robots are taken by the Jovians to be humans, and prove so superior to the Jovians that the Jovian superiority complex crumbles.

"First Law," *Fantastic Universe,* October 1946, is a casual short-short and a tall tale about a robot (of the MA series) that breaks the first law because she is a mother, and mother-love supersedes every other law.

"Let's Get Together," *Infinity,* February 1957, describes a stalemate between East and West that is unbalanced by a report that the East has developed a superior ability to manufacture humanoid robots. Ten of them reportedly are in the U.S. carrying fragments of a TC (total conversion) bomb. A big scientific conference is to consider the problem, but as the scientists are gathering the Chief of the Bureau of Robotics decides that the meeting is the means for bringing the humanoids together and wiping out the scientific minds of the West.

"Satisfaction Guaranteed," *Amazing,* April 1951, is a story that might have qualified for *I, Robot.* In an attempt to make robots acceptable on Earth (and in the home), USR makes TN-3 ("Tony"), "a tall and darkly handsome" humanoid. He turns out to be a perfect household servant, not only helpful but creative, redecorating the house and the mistress of the house. By seeming to fall in love with her, Tony also restores her sense of adequacy. Susan Calvin comments that "machines can't fall in love, but—even when it's hopeless and horrifying—women can."

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"Risk," *Astounding,* May 1955, returns to the scene of "Little Lost Robot," Hyper Base, where the search for a hyperspace interstellar drive has achieved success—except that animals come back mindless. A robot is placed in an experimental ship, but at the appointed time nothing happens. Over strenuous objections, Susan Calvin sends a man to investigate rather than a robot; and he discovers that the robot, instructed only to pull the control bar *firmly* toward him, pulled it with robot strength and bent it. The point of the story, however, is that a man was sent rather than a robot, not because human life is valued less, but that a robot can't be useful unless it can be given precise orders. It can't be asked to "find out what's wrong."

"Lenny," *Infinity,* January 1958, begins with a child accidentally inserting random programming into a new LNE ("Lenny") model. Lenny turns out behaving like an infant. Susan Calvin says that Lenny has great promise because he is teachable, but he raises First Law fears when he breaks an employee's arm—as it turns out, by trying to ward off a blow. Susan protects Lenny by pointing out that he did not know his own strength and could not yet differentiate between good and evil. Moreover, he will help solve the problem of getting young people interested in robotics by adding the spice of danger. Perhaps more important, she feels motherly "toward the only kind of baby she could ever have or love."

"Galley Slave," *Galaxy,* December 1957, takes up the problem of mental drudgery. USR introduces a proofreading robot, EZ-27 ("Easy"). A few months later Prof. Simon Ninheimer, opposed to the idea of leasing Easy at the beginning, sues USR because Easy inserted embarrassing mistakes into his new book. Easy has a block against talking about it. The robot is brought into the courtroom as Ninheimer is describing how badly his reputation has been injured by Easy's action, and Easy rises to speak. Ninheimer shouts that he has been told to remain silent. But Easy was about to take all the blame upon himself. Ninheimer's motivation was not simply hatred of robots but an effort to keep creative scholarship from being taken over by robots.

The remainder of the robot stories are scattered throughout five different collections of short stories. All of the stories were written and published after 1956. Two of them, in which robots play a less central role than in any of those dealt with before now, were reprinted in Asimov's collection of stories *Earth Is Room Enough* in 1957.

"Jokester," *Infinity,* December 1956, deals with Multivac, Asi-

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mov's all-purpose computer (named, by analogy, after the early computer called Univac). Grand Masters, the only persons capable of comprehending the functions of the giant computer and asking the meaningful questions that had become the bottleneck in dealing with Multivac, are permitted great latitude. One of them, Meyerhoff, who has a reputation as a jokester, begins telling jokes to Multivac in an effort to discover who invents them. Multivac ultimately reveals that jokes are placed in selected human minds by extraterrestrials who use them to study human psychology; once this is known the method will become useless as an objective technique. Humanity loses its sense of humor; there will be no more jokes, no more laughter.

"Someday," *Infinity,* August 1956, tells the story of a couple of children who pull out of storage a robot storyteller called Bard and try to get it to tell more modern stories. It ends up kicked, abused, and deserted, telling itself a story about a poor little storytelling robot named Bard who will be appreciated someday.

Here, as elsewhere, readers will notice a playfulness in Asimov, an occasional lack of seriousness that results in stories tossed off casually. Some critics might consider this as disqualifying Asimov from literary consideration, but Asimov does not consider himself a literary man. He is a writer and he writes anything that appeals to him. Some stories are inconsequential, but there are Asimov stories in which the reader feels engaged at a level of seriousness that asks the reader to take the story seriously. The playfulness does not disqualify anything else; it should be assessed at its own level, like Asimov's limericks or love of puns.

Two more stories, from 1958 and 1956, appear in *Nine Tomorrows,* an Asimov collection published in 1959. They, too, deal with Multivac.

"All the Troubles of the World," *Super-Science Fiction,* April 1958, describes a world fifty years after the creation of Multivac, when it tries to destroy itself because it has been loaded with all of humanity's troubles and it "wants to die."

"The Last Question," *Science Fiction Quarterly,* November 1956, has been called, by Asimov himself, "the best science fiction short story ever written." It has been the basis for several planetarium shows. It begins on May 21, 2061, when two technicians ask Multivac if entropy can be reversed. As humanity spreads outward through the galaxy and then the universe, it asks the same question of increasingly more complex computers and always gets the same response: "Insufficient data for meaningful answer." The universe

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winds down into the heat death called entropy; and humanity fuses its mind with Cosmic AC, which exists in hyperspace. Finally AC learns how to reverse entropy and says, "Let there be light." "And there was light."

Three robot stories are contained in Asimov's *Nightfall and Other Stories,* published in 1969.

"Insert Knob A in Hole B," *Fantasy and Science Fiction,* December 1957, is a minor short-short about two spacemen on a space station who can't get equipment to work properly because it is all shipped unassembled with inadequate instructions. Finally they are shipped a robot programmed to put everything together. But it arrives unassembled.

"The Machine That Won the War," *Fantasy and Science Fiction,* October 1961, is another Multivac story. Multivac has been given credit for winning the war with Deneb; but in the last few months of the war the man who was feeding in the data began to fudge it because the data were unreliable, the man who was reading the results began to fudge them because he knew Multivac was unreliable, and the man who had to make the decision relied on flipping a coin.

"Segregationist," *Abbottempo,* Book 4, 1967, describes a world in which humans are getting metal replacement parts that make them increasingly like robots; and robots are getting fibroid replacement parts that make them increasingly like humans; but the surgeon is old fashioned and prefers to be all one thing—robot.

The Best of Isaac Asimov, published in 1973, contains, in addition to a reprint of "The Last Question," "Mirror Image," a robot story involving Lije Baley and R. Daneel Olivaw, the principal characters in Asimov's two robot detective novels, *The Caves of Steel* and *The Naked Sun.* First published in *Analog,* May 1972, the story presents a problem in which two robots confirm the identically opposite stories of their masters, each of whom claims to have come up with an important mathematical technique and to have confided it to the other. Olivaw brings the problem to Baley. Baley questions the robots and comes up, finally, with an asymmetrical response that he interprets as proving the older mathematician's robot is lying. At the last he reveals that the response could have meant just the opposite, but he already had decided that the older mathematician would never have confided in a younger man.

A final (though with Asimov nothing is certainly final) five stories are included in *The Bicentennial Man and Other Stories,* an Asimov collection published in 1976.

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"Feminine Intuition," *Fantasy and Science Fiction,* October 1969, introduces a feminine robot for the first time (other than the throwaway MA series in "First Law," which may be only a tall tale). JN-5 ("Jane") is developed to be intuitive and to produce useful guesses about which suns are likely to have habitable planets. But she is destroyed in an airplane accident along with her creator. Apparently, however, she has come up with the names of three stars within eighty light-years that probably have habitable planets. Somebody may have heard her reveal the names, but a search turns up nobody. Finally the eighty-year-old Susan Calvin is recalled from retirement and from the evidence comes up with the answer: Jane had spoken before she boarded the plane and was overheard by a truck driver, someone nobody would have thought of.

"That Thou Art Mindful of Him" was commissioned for an anthology entitled *Final Stage,* published in 1974, which was intended to contain the ultimate stories on a variety of themes. Asimov's, of course, was robots. The story also was published in *Fantasy and Science Fiction,* May 1974. The story returns to the Second Law: how can a robot judge whether or not to obey an order, *i.e.,* what is a human being? In space the question is not as important, since most humans in space are responsible, but if robots are to be introduced on Earth a diverse group of uninformed humans will be able to give them orders, and robots must be able to discriminate. JG ("George") models are created to make that judgment; they will begin by obeying all orders and then learn discrimination. George Ten persuades his creator to allow him to discuss the matter with George Nine. They come up with one solution to the introduction of robots on Earth: USR can make simple robots, such as robot birds, bugs, and worms to handle ecological problems, that do not need the Three Laws because they are limited to simple actions. These will begin the process of accustoming humanity to robots. Meanwhile George Ten and Nine come to the conclusion that only they are human. Eventually they will take over.

Finally, it seems, the Frankenstein complex has proved to be not so illogical after all. With "That Thou Art Mindful of Him" Asimov appeared to have written himself out of the positronic robot series, but he was above such petty inconsistencies.

"The Life and Times of Multivac," *New York Times Magazine,* January 5, 1975, returns to the theme of the omniscient, omnipotent computer. In "The Evitable Conflict" the Machines had taken over control of everything because they knew what was good for humanity, but they kept their omniscience and omnipotence to them-

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selves. (In "That Thou Art Mindful of Him" the Machines, it was revealed, had phased themselves out, perhaps unwisely(!), after they perceived their job was done.) In the present story, a few people have begun to perceive a similar takeover by Multivac as slavery. Ronald Bakst gains the confidence of Multivac and supplies it with a problem in his field of mathematical games that he says could lead to human genetic changes that would create a humanity more likely to accept Multivac's direction. Bakst is viewed as a traitor to humanity but uses Multivac's distraction to uncouple a joint at a key spot and burn out Multivac. At the end, as the other rebels stare at him, he asks uncertainly, "Isn't that what you want?" Such ambiguity is unusual in Asimov.

"The Tercentennary Incident," *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine,* August 1976, offers a new look at the question of the robot as political leader. At a Fourth of July celebration around the Washington Monument in 2076, the President of the United States, which now is a part of a planetary Federation, is disintegrated; but he then appears upon the platform to announce that what had happened had been the breakdown of a robot made to serve certain presidential functions. President Winkler becomes a great President, but a Secret Service agent named Edwards, who had seen the incident, believes that the real President had been disintegrated by a new and secret weapon and replaced by a robot. Edwards tries to convince the President's personal secretary and urges him to observe the President closely and, if he discovers sufficient evidence, to persuade him to resign. But the secretary turns out to have been part of the scheme from the beginning and now must do away with Edwards. Asimov notes in an afterword that this story was a return to the theme developed in "Evidence" thirty years before and suggests that he has done it better.

"The Bicentennial Man," *Stellar Science Fiction* #2, February 1976, provides a kind of closing counterpart to "Robbie." Like Robbie, NDR ("Andrew") is a loyal and loving servant; he loves and serves the Martins. Unlike Robbie, Andrew not only can talk but, by some strange combination of brain pathways, can also create art and learn. The Martin family benefits by selling his art but also deposits half the income in a bank deposit for Andrew and sees that he is provided every robot improvement. Finally Andrew asks to buy his freedom, begins to wear clothes, writes a history of robots, obtains legal rights for robots, has his brain put in an organic body, and becomes a robobiologist. While USR develops ways of making robots with more precise positronic pathways (to avoid a repetition

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of Andrew) and then robots controlled by a central brain (as in "With Folded Hands"), Andrew develops a system for gaining energy for his new body from the combustion of hydrocarbons. He also learns to reason that what seems like cruelty might, in the long run, be kindness. When asked where all this is leading, Andrew says, "My body is a canvas on which I intend to draw—" And a roboticist completes the sentence: "A man?" For his accomplishments Andrew is honored as the Sesquicentennial Robot on the 150th anniversary of his construction. Then he wants to be declared a man by the World Legislature. After many years of struggle, Andrew recognizes that human antipathy toward him is rooted in his immortality and he arranges for the potential to be drained slowly from his brain so that he will die within a year. On his two-hundredth anniversary the World President signs the act and declares the dying Andrew "a Bicentennial Man." His last thoughts are of the child to which he was nursemaid.

"The Bicentennial Man" is a fitting conclusion to the robot saga in other ways. At last Asimov has arrived at the essential question: what is the difference between robots and humans? He first asked the question in "Evidence." He brought up and dismissed external evidence; even actions might only demonstrate that Byerley is an extremely good man. In "Victory Unintentional," the robots are believed to be humans and a superior race by the Jovians because the robots never say they are not. In "Let's Get Together," the question of distinguishing humanoids from humans is short-circuited by induction. In "Risk," we learn that the difference between robots and humans is that humans can be given general orders; in "Lenny," that humans, and only unusual kinds of robots, can learn. "That Thou Art Mindful of Him" speculates that given the opportunity to make the judgement robots will decide, on the basis of their superiority, that only they are human. "The Tercentennary Incident" distinguishes robot from human only by superior performance.

Finally, in "The Bicentennial Man," Asimov follows the question to its final answer. Andrew's first human attribute is his artistic ability, but this is not enough, nor is his bank account. Perhaps the distinguishing characteristic is freedom. Andrew continues to explore the differences between humans and robots: humans wear clothes and robots do not; humans have rights and robots do not; humans have biological bodies and robots have metal bodies; humans gain energy from the combustion of hydrocarbons, robots, from atomic energy; humans can discriminate between short-term cruelty and long-term kindness, and robots cannot; humans die and robots

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are immortal. But perhaps the final distinction is Andrew's sentimental and hard-to-rationalize desire to be human when he is so clearly superior to humans in every way. The sentimentality that threatens the story, however, is essential to the argument: robots are always rational and humans are not. Humans act for emotional reasons, and, ultimately, so does Andrew. Andrew, indeed, has become human.

In the process of writing twenty-nine stories about robots over a period of thirty-nine years, Asimov has let various inconsistencies creep in. This is not simply the problem of chronology, which has various minor glitches, but of incompatibility: if some of the events took place, others could not. Some of these, as in "The Evitable Conflict," Asimov disposes of by declaring (in "That Thou Art Mindful of Him") that the Machines phased themselves out when they thought their job was done. Others he simply ignores, such as the fact that the Machines and the Multivac of "The Life and Times of Multivac" could not co-exist, nor if Multivac was destroyed could it be "The Machine that Won the War" nor the computer that answered "The Last Question." And if the robots take over some time after the end of "That Thou Art Mindful of Him," some of the subsequent stories would be not only redundant but impossible. In other cases, as in "Lenny," the invention of the teachable robot is made and then forgotten. "Segregationist" suggests the coexistence and even equality of humans and robots; robots are introduced and re-introduced on Earth, as in "Satisfaction Guaranteed," "Galley Slave," "That Thou Art Mindful of Him," and "The Bicentennial Man," as if none of the other attempts had ever led to anything.

Asimov is eclectic. He never set out to write a consistent future history of the robots, even though the publication and the surprising success of *I, Robot,* with its parts glued together, made it seem so; and a certain amount of common elements and cross-references has tended to reinforce the illusion. But it would be a mistake to judge the robot stories on this basis. *I, Robot* is the self-sufficient and almost self-consistent work and should be adequate for the critic desiring some kind of unity.

The robot stories are a body of literature, much like the Scandinavian sagas or the Greek legends, that comes at the question of how one should respond to the reality of the particular universe in which they exist from a cluster of viewpoints, and finds its greatest value not in internal consistency but multiplicity of consideration. In the robot stories Asimov has provided readers with the unique

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excitement of an inquiring and artistic mind returning again and again to a single question and discovering not only new variations but sometimes different answers.

Notes

1. Some confusion in dates remains: the Introduction says that Susan Calvin joined USR in 2008; she says, in the lead-in to "Runaround," that it was 2007. "Runaround," unless it is a typographical error, refers to *fifty*-year-old antique mounts [robots].
2. In 1970 Prof. Marvin Minsky (in "The Bicentennial Man" there is a robopsychologist named Merton Mansky) of the M.I.T. project on artificial intelligence spoke to the SFWA Nebula Award banquet about his work and the help that writers such as Asimov and Clarke had provided in laying out the chain of development from the golem to providing teleological goals. Asimov got up and responded that the thought that kept running through his mind was, "What kind of goals would a Golem have if a Golem could have goals?"
3. The word "robotics" was invented by Asimov, although he didn't realize it at the time. He has said that if he is to be remembered at all in future years it will be for the Three Laws of Robotics.
4. The mention of the First Law in "Robbie" and of the Three Laws in "Reason" clearly are interpolations for the 1950 book, as is the mention of Susan Calvin in "Robbie" and "Runaround."
5. This is the only mention of competition in the robot business.

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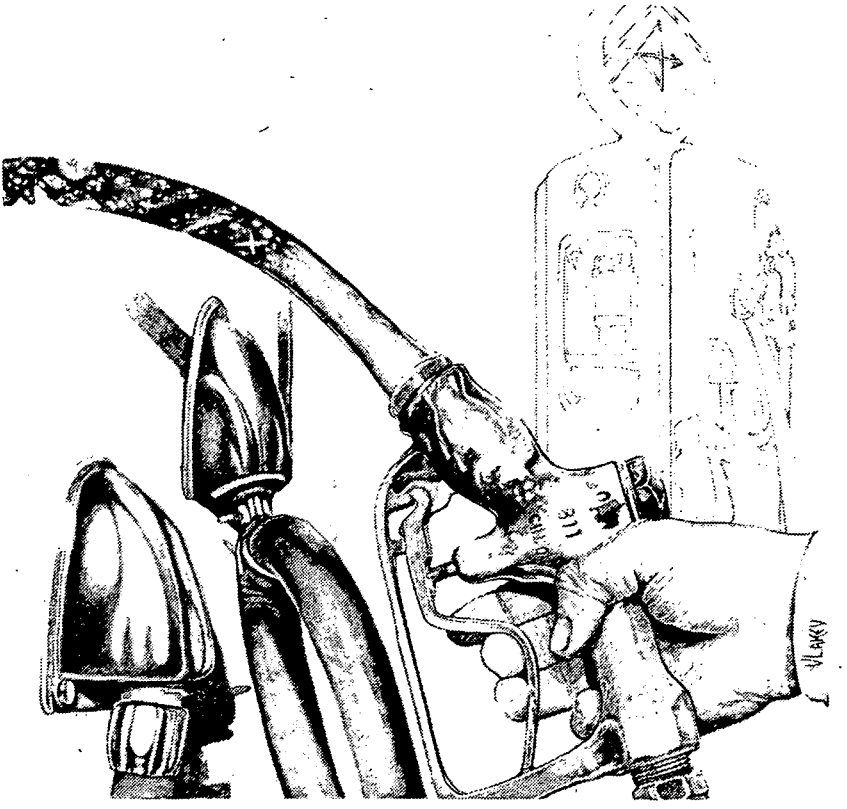
OUT OF SERVICE

by John M. Ford

art: Val Lakey



Mr. Ford wrote this as a companion piece to his "Mandalay," which appeared in the October 1979 issue of IA'sf; *but is it a sequel? . . . prequel? Time—when the Alternities Corporation is concerned—is not so simple as one might hope.*

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Collier had seen the triangular sign light up when he was still more than a mile away. He paused in the shade of a rock, pulled the scrap of map from his backpack, and checked it—a stupid gesture, he supposed. There hadn't been a possibility of a wrong turn on this road in miles; there weren't any branches, and damn few bends. Just a strip of two-lane blacktop through red-yellow-white desert.

All the same, it reassured Collier just a little to see the symbol on his map, just as it shone in the twilight ahead: the A-arrowhead trademark of Alternities Corporation. *You are here,* he thought, *wherever in hell that is.*

It was entirely dark when Collier reached the spill of light around the oasis. A filling station, three pumps advertising less than half a dollar a gallon for regular and "Ethyl"—that was leaded gas, Collier remembered—and something even more heartbreaking for diesel.

There were two service bays on one side of the building, a glassed-in lunch counter on the other, a small office in between. Over the office door a sign said:

BEN'S TRINITY SERVICE
AND RESTAURANT
BEN PAINTER, PROPRIETOR

Collier looked up again at the Alternities trademark, bitterly amused to see rust on the sign. ARROW OIL CO., it said, and for one moment Collier was frightened; he might be in the wrong place, after all—

No. While it was quite certain he was in the wrong place, he had also just found the way out.

He walked into the office. A bell tinkled on the door. "Moment," said a voice from the diner, and a big man appeared in the doorway. He had on a white shirt and an apron folded double, and a white paper cap. His face was broad, rough-cut but not unpleasant, a deep red-brown color. "Didn't hear you drive up—oh. Hiking in this country?"

Collier tripped the catches on his pack, eased it to the floor. "You're Ben Painter?"

"Yeah." Painter put down the glass he was wiping. "You all right, fella? Walk that desert all day, you'll drop dead with heatstroke before you know it."

"I'm all right," Collier said. "Dane Collier, Alternities Guide Two,

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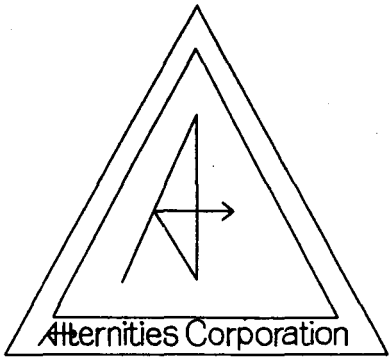

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We're building your dreams.

from EMPLOYEE'S EMERGENCY MANUAL (99-MAN)

Interline Traffic Control

§ 35.1 In the event that a Code 99 [or any emergency involving worldline transfer-gate function] has been called, it is imperative that personnel with gate traffic responsibility limit access to gates to those persons specifically authorized and qualified to deal with the particular emergency.

§ 35.2 Corollary to this is the necessity of avoiding spurious and/or misdirected interline transfers. One person sent to an incorrect destination can create a greater hazard than twenty persons delayed on a line that they are at least prepared and equipped for.

-- last revision 13/9 by Operations Center, Ouray.

NOTE: The Emergency Manual is for the information of Alternities Corporation employees ONLY and is not to be made available to the general public. Violators of this policy are subject to the severest discipline available to Alternities Corporation under the law.

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Carlsbad Primitive line. According to the 99-Manual, you've got an emergency gate at this station. I'm stuck on the wrong line and I need out."

"Well, God damn. Come on in here, Collier, and have a cup of coffee. I'm a Service Three myself, and they teach us to make good coffee." He waved, took a step back.

Collier stepped forward. He felt dizzy, cold and damp—it was quite cool inside the office, and he hadn't allowed for it after the hot day's march. "You don't understand, Painter. There's been a Fracture—an accident—I'm trapped on the wrong worldline. I've got to get Home and report."

"No, Mister Collier, I understand. How long you been walking out there?"

Now I've done it, Collier thought. *I'm on a line where there isn't any Alternities Corporation, and I'm going to wind up in a laughing academy. But—Painter had said—*

"You're Service Three? Alternities—" *Where the hell did I put my ident?*

"That's right. Alternities Corporation. Trained at Ouray Center, just like you. Now, it's important: how long ago did this accident happen?"

"D-days. Maybe weeks."

"You come in now. Have some coffee. And sit down; I've got some pretty bad news." Painter reached out, took Collier's arm and guided him into the diner. He sat Collier down firmly in a booth, vanished for a moment and reappeared with two heavy china mugs of black coffee and a small bottle.

"Been taking salt tablets?"

Collier nodded. "Desert line—three years."

"No," Painter said. "Six years."

"I said I . . . " Collier breathed the coffee vapors, took a scorching swallow. His head began to unfog. "I . . . three years . . . plus . . . you're trying to tell me it's been three years here since the accident on my Carlsbad line."

Painter nodded. "There's more. The Fracture wasn't confined to one line. It tore them all to pieces. What I hear is, Ouray Center's completely closed, except for the people trying to straighten out the mess."

"Three years . . . " Collier had no trouble accepting Painter's statements. When Alternities shoved its customers through the worldline gates at Ouray, in Colorado, on Earth, one of the extra-cost options was to bring them back in less time than the vacation

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had actually taken. Be an asteroid miner or an African explorer for a week and come home twenty minutes after you left. Time, said the ads, is just part of the business at Alternities.

Or had been, evidently.

" . . . then it's very important that I use your gate. Three years, my God—"

Painter sipped his coffee. "I may not be able to do that," he said from behind the cup. His eyes were calm.

Collier's head felt light again. "It was damaged in the—what'd you call it? The Fracture?"

"You called it that too. That's what everybody calls it. Nobody knows who called it that first.

"No, I believe my duckout's working all right. I may not be able to let you use it . . . that's all." There was a stomach-jolting finality to Painter's last two words.

"For God's sake, why?"

Painter's tone was maddeningly even. "You know how emergency gates work?"

"They're one-way. And fixed-frequency, of course; you can't tune one between worlds. They only go one place . . . Homeline."

"Almost right. What Homeline?"

"Ouray Center, of course."

"Still almost. What Ouray Center?"

Collier realized he was nearly out of his seat. As he sat back, slowly, he said, "You mean . . . there's more . . . than one."

Painter nodded. "I'll give you all the help I can getting to Ouray cross-country. Maps, provisions—good Alteco Service stuff, not canned goods—clean up your idents, if there's anything wrong with them. And you're welcome to stay here as long as you like. I'm alone enough. But unless you prove to me that it leads to your own particular Homeline, not some similar one, you will not go through my gate."

"How can I prove that when I don't know myself?"

"I could ask you just one question, and if you'd answer honestly that would end it."

"Then ask, for crying out loud."

"I'm sorry, Collier. I can't trust you not to lie."

"You *what?*"

Painter stood, walked behind the counter—Collier staring hotly after him—returned with fresh coffee. "I'm sorry."

"Well, that makes it fine, doesn't it. I could always just—"

"No, Mister Collier. I'm a Three. You're a Two. You couldn't."

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"Then what else can I do? I've already done a lot of walking."

"Talk to me."

"What about?"

"Anything. Your Homeline. The line you worked on."

"And if I say the secret word I get to go home?"

"Not that simple. It's more what you don't say . . . and you won't trick me, either. Don't try. Five lost men, and a woman, all been through here. None of them used my gate. Two of the men were NEMSECs."

Collier's throat tightened. Noncostumed Emergency Security people were Alternities' universal interline cops. They had to deal with everything from dinosaurs to gatling-lasers. They were very good.

"And the woman?"

"She was an Administration Two. She offered what you'd expect. But she didn't use my gate."

"And did you—"

"I said, I'm alone enough." Painter's red knuckles were white as bone on the handle of his mug.

Collier was quiet. He was afraid of Painter, afraid that the lonely lighthouse keeper had gone mad. He thought how easily the desert would swallow up six unmarked graves.

He had been asked to talk. So he talked.

"I was on Carlsbad Primitive. Cave trips, but without electric lights or concrete walkways. Just some safety rails on the long drops, and lanternlight. And thrown torches."

"What kind?"

"Thrown. Up into the high ledges of the big cave rooms. Lights up a whole room, with a beautiful flicker. The technique's old—you just need a long stick, with something to burn on the end. We use tampons soaked in kerosene, though I don't know how far back *that* goes."

"Sounds interesting. Not like some of the lines Alternities was running."

"You mean the war lines, or the Roman orgy lines?"

Painter did not smile. "I can understand playing war. Or playing sex, sure, same thing. But there are lines . . . things . . . I can not . . . " Painter let the point trail.

Collier picked up his old line of conversation. "Not that this is like real caving. I've been on some of *those* trips, with carbide lanterns and not a handhold but those God put there—and there have been a couple with nothing but torches, like the prehistoric Indians—" Collier caught a strange look on Painter's face, wondered if

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he had said the wrong thing.

Or the right one.

He started to ask what Painter's worldline specialty was, then hesitated for fear of—well, for fear. So instead he said, "You really love this place, don't you?" and hoped there was no sarcasm to be found in it.

Painter smiled slightly—he did not seem capable of more—and stood up. "Come outside," he said. "Bring your coffee."

Seven graves would be nothing to that desert. But Collier had been asked outside. So he went.

The moon was down, and the sky was crowded with stars, more coming out by the second as Collier's eyes adjusted to the dark. Painter was silhouetted against the stars, but he was not looking at them. His gaze was fixed outward, into the desert.

"Do you see how the light spills out," he said, "like an island of light in a great dark sea?

"I got carried around in trucks a lot, when I was small. Loading, unloading crates. Then I drove trucks for a while. It hit me real hard once, then, just how many times I'd looked into the big dark from the light of gas stations. . . .

"Then there wasn't any gas. And pretty soon no lights either. And when I signed my ticket with Alternities, I figured NEMSEC, what else? But they offered me this . . . and what could I do but take it?

"Any of this mean anything to you, Collier? Dane? I never even asked you when you were born, did I?"

"I . . . don't know as it'd mean the same, now. Not since the Fracture."

"No. Time doesn't mean the same, does it? There's a war on, did you know, Dane, in this line. Still going on, it seems, even after the Fracture. With some Germans."

"Seems like it's always some Germans."

"You said it, I didn't. But the gas trucks come out to supply me, and the food trucks, and they all have ration stickers on the windshields. Some of the drivers stop for my coffee, and say 'Don't worry, Alternities is still paying the bills,' but some won't stop, and they say 'Arrow pays, I s'pose,' and they drive off laughing. Injun—Arrow. That's a big joke to some people.

"And their faces, as they drive away without drinking my coffee, seem to melt like my grandfather's sandpaintings in a strong wind. . . ."

Collier knew that he must act. It was a long time till dawn. And they were alone enough for anything.

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"Got to go to the can," he said casually. "Too much coffee too quick, I guess."

Collier stepped through the office door, starting at the jangle of the bell. He crouched by the pack, aware of how visible he was, through the glass, in the light; he scuttled behind the cash register counter. After a quick search beneath the register for a gun that was not there, Collier went back to the backpack.

It was a fine example of what Alternities called Serendipity Design; one item, many functions. The aluminum hex-rods of the frame would telescope and reconnect into stretcher or tent poles; the nylon pack itself folded out into a stretcher sling or cramped pup tent. All Collier wanted just now, however, were the poles.

Shortly, the pack lay limp and sagging, and Collier had two meter-long staffs. They were not end-weighted like throwing torches, but he could handle them.

He couldn't use the office door, with its telltale bell. An open doorway led to the service bays, and he slipped through, glanced once at the uncertain glinting shapes of tools and equipment, and moved out the bay door.

Painter was not in view, and Collier at once flattened himself against the station wall, cursing how the aluminum shafts caught the light.

He took a step forward, looking right, left, seeing no one among chain stalactites and gas-pump stalagmites. His glance went up, to the station roof.

The rod was heavier than a wooden torch, but it was an easy end-over-end toss to the roof. The rod landed with a clatter and a crash of glass and rolled a bit, its hexagonal faces clunk-clunk-clunking.

Collier strained for a sound, then was certain he heard footsteps and saw movement from the station's far side. He took a step away from the building, unlimbering his second bar to swing.

Within the service area, an empty white shirt grew a face and hands, and the hands gripped Collier's wrists so that first the aluminum shaft and then Collier hit the ground. Painter rolled Collier face down, driving the breath from Collier's chest, pulled Collier's arms up between his shoulderblades so that tendons creaked.

"You always say the john," the big man said. "Even the woman said the john."

Collier gasped.

"I am an Alternities Three, Mister Collier. You are a Two, probably not far past a One-Trainee. That means more than just more pay and data cards in my service file. It is a basic difference in what

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we are.

"The people who choose this line for their Alternities vacations are prone to severe attacks of guilt, Mister Collier. Sometimes the little scientists get violent—the big strong soldiers mostly bite their lips, but they have fits too, and I have to deal with them all."

"What—" Collier wheezed, "kind of—"

On the faraway horizon there was a flash, intolerably bright; Collier closed his eyes, squeezed them tight, and it was still as if the sun were rising inside his eyelids. Or ten suns, or a hundred, a thousand suns. The light climbed into the desert no-longer-night sky, trailing a stalk of transilluminated smoke.

After seconds and seconds and seconds more—God, the thing must have been *miles* away—came the sound, thunder that cracked forever, and behind the sound the wind. Collier's ears popped, and sand scoured him, and still with his eyes closed he saw that monstrous mushroom, pillar of fire by night.

After a while all was still—very still, and Collier was certain he was a little deafened.

He discovered he was free to move, stiff but not held. Painter was nearby, getting to his feet. Painter's face was blank, as if the fire and wind had melted and smoothed all expression away. Collier abandoned the idea of attacking him again. And the question burst from him:

"What in the name of God was that?"

Painter stopped still. He turned his head, very slowly, to face Collier, and his mouth was a little open. He pointed toward the dying glow.

"You . . . don't . . . know?"

Collier shook his head. "If a whole gasworks went up it wouldn't have made a flash like that. Chemical fire? Or—a shooting star? Or a comet? Is that what people come here to see, Painter? A comet hitting the Earth?"

"You don't know. And damn me, I believe you. Come with me," Painter said, and grabbed Collier's shoulder so that he had no choice. Together they went inside—Collier could hear the bell only as a distant tinkling—and to the door marked LADIES. Painter shoved it open with Collier's body. With his free hand he was fumbling inside his shirt.

He came up with a strangely shaped piece of metal, which he touched to the rivets holding the lavatory mirror to the wall.

Sink, mirror, and wall opened outward on silent, invisible hinges. Beyond was a rectangle of absolute black—darkness so total it

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seemed to suck light from the room, and Collier's eyes kept seeking specks and streaks of light within it.

"Can't I—"

"No," Painter said. "You want your pack, I'll get it, but otherwise not one second here to think about—anything."

"I don't want the pack," Collier said, suddenly quite calm. "Will I be seeing you, one of these days then, at Ouray?"

"Not likely, Dane Collier. Much as I'd like to go . . . to your world. Now go."

"Goodbye," Collier said, and entered the darkness of the gate. Halfway there, before his eyes were through, he realized that he was bound for Painter's Homeline as well as his own. He knew why Painter had exiled himself to guard the gate home; as a human firebreak, to keep *that* blaze from spreading across the Homelines.

He shouted his thanks as loud as he could, from the gate, from the dark, and would never know if Painter had heard them.

FIRST SOLUTION TO THE BACKWARD BANANA (from page 55)

The palindromic sequences are:

NO LEMONS, NO MELON.

PULL UP IF I PULL UP.

NO, IT IS OPEN ON ONE POSITION.

Now focus your mind vigorously on this paragraph and on all its words. What's so unusual about it? Don't just zip through it quickly. Go through it slowly. Tax your brain as much as you can.

If you fail to see what is so remarkable about the above paragraph, you'll find the answer on page 100.

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TRANSFERENCE

by Sharon Webb

art: Linda Miller

Actually, the author insists, her real nursing work—specializing in cardiac cases—has nothing at all to do with psychotherapists—either human or mechanical. But still . . . .

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While she was waiting for the elevator, Marilyn Taylor decided she had eaten too much lunch. She always ate too much when she was nervous, and lately it seemed she was always nervous.

She could visualize the remains of the lunch in her stomach: first a layer of antipasto with five masticated yet still recognizable olives; laminated to that, a layer of spaghetti with mushrooms and meat sauce; bulging above that, a hideous topping of garlic bread.

She felt a belch quicken against her diaphragm. Oh, damn the garlic bread.

She felt as if her stomach protruded most noticeably. Acutely aware of its convexity, she looked around to see if anyone else noticed. The mezzanine held a large assortment of business people and secretaries who seemed preoccupied with other matters, thank God. It seemed to her that her stomach waxed and waned like a great bulging tide lately, probably because she was getting old, clinging precariously to the backside of thirty.

She stabbed at the elevator **up** button and broke a nail. It hung for a moment like a chipped new moon until she snatched it off with her other hand and flung it onto the floor.

The elevator farthest away from her spread open its doors. By the time she reached it, it was full. She poked the **up** button again, patting her sandaled foot impatiently. She stopped in mid-pat and stared with growing horror at her foot. She had torn her hose. The end of her great toe was beginning to emerge from its wrapping like a grotesque worm coming out of a suntan-beige cocoon. She curled her toes involuntarily. The tension she exerted caused the hole to enlarge and deliver her entire great toe naked into the world. It lay obscenely in contrast to its suntan-beige sisters. She shuddered.

It seemed to her that life was most unfair.

That thought was reinforced when the far elevator again clanged its signal and splayed open its doors. She was the last in. A sea of faces looked out. She was painfully aware of her nude toe. It seemed especially large. It gleamed palely under the fluorescent lights as she stepped in and turned around to face the elevator door.

She peered at the buttons, dimly because her glasses were smeared, and reached over a portly gentleman to press **22.** On the twenty-second floor lay salvation—the Psychotherapy Division of Allied Meditronics.

The elevator door opened on the third floor. A man in a business suit squeezed on. The door closed behind him nearly catching his coattail. He didn't have room to turn around.

She backed up when he got on. She trod heavily on the toe of the

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man behind her and his briefcase pressed suggestively against the small of her back; but even so, she found her nose a scant hand's breadth from the newcomer's. Their bellies grazed.

It was aquiline, his nose, and pale—nearly as pale as her great toe. He had light blue eyes and straight blond lashes, and he had a mole on his right temple. She fixed her eyes on his mole.

They rose in silence to the eighth floor and then he said, "You've had garlic, my dear."

Someone snickered.

She felt a hapless smirk rise on her lips and grow rigid there. She wouldn't breathe out. She wouldn't. Not until the haven of the twenty-second floor.

The elevator crept interminably, as if endorsing all the laws of entropy and inertia.

She couldn't hold her breath any longer. She contrived to cock her head, lower her chin, and aim the effluvium at his mid-section. It was a good plan except that her temple impacted on a large package held by a man next to her, causing the right lens of her glasses to pop out and slither down the front of the pale-eyed stranger. The lens hung for a moment on his lapel, then disappeared somewhere below.

In despair, she fumbled at his front with one hand, then both, praying all the while for something to swallow her up and hide her in its dark belly. She couldn't find the lens. Her fingers patted and crept over his vest and explored his belt. Her hand met his once. All the while, the smirk lay like a stone on her face. She stared at the place where his mole was. Mercifully, with her right lens gone she couldn't see it well—or the expression in his pale eyes. She didn't breathe.

At last, the elevator opened at the twenty-second floor. The pale-eyed man took one step and raised his hand. Between his fingers gleamed a plastic disc—her lens. "I believe you dropped this, my dear."

She seized it with damp fingers, muttered a garlicky, "Thanks," and escaped into the hall. Her mouth was dry. She popped the smeary lens back into her glasses and sought a water fountain. One squatted in a niche in the wall. When the button was pressed, water rose like a geyser and delivered a squirt into her nose. She cursed under her breath and rummaged in her handbag for a tissue. As she rummaged, the strap on her bag loosed itself from its attachments. It hung by three threads. She found a rumpled Kleenex covered with tobacco crumbs which she applied to her nose and her glasses

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in a vain attempt to clean them.

She retrieved a mirror from the depths of her purse. The effort caused one of the three threads holding her handbag strap to sever. Mirror in hand, she removed the tobacco crumbs from her nose with her broken fingernail.

Another thread broke.

Marilyn found the office. The legend on the door said:

ALLIED MEDITRONICS
Psychotherapy Dept.

She turned the knob and went in. No one was there. A vinyl love seat and two orange chairs competed for space with a metal desk and a plastic rubber plant. On the desk, a cup of coffee sent up a plume of steam.

She stood uncertainly near the door, cleared her throat loudly, and coughed once or twice in an attempt to raise somebody. There was no response.

The aroma from the coffee cup rose enticingly. Lord, how she'd love to have a cup. The larcenous thought came that if she stole the cup and ran out into the hall, no one would know. The thought died when a loud flush came from the next room. In a few moments a young woman came in from the inner office, obviously startled that someone was there.

"Well, hello," Marilyn stuck out her hand at the woman while simultaneously banging her shoulder bag against her hip. The final thread on the strap gave way, launching her bag and its contents onto the floor.

The woman watched curiously as Marilyn dived to the floor to retrieve her belongings. She stuffed everything back, all the while wishing for an earlier, simpler time when all a person had to wear was an animal skin and all anybody had to carry was a club with no straps on it.

The girl gingerly held out something between two delicate fingers. "I believe this is yours, too."

It was her lipstick: "Coral Melon." The cover had come off and it was squashed into a blob. A dust-fuzzie adhered to one end.

"Oh, thanks." Marilyn dropped the lipstick into her purse. "I've come for therapy."

"Well, I don't know—" the girl began doubtfully. "We're still experimental here."

"Yes, I know. I'm part of the experiment. Doctor Dalton of the

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university referred me. He said it wouldn't do me any harm and he thought I could relate better to a machine because I have trouble relating to people. I've always had trouble relating to people, you see. I don't know why—" Oh, why did she have to ramble so? Why didn't she just say, "I have an appointment." Couldn't she *ever* be proper and elegant? She realized how elusive that dream was. She'd never be elegant.

"Do you have an appointment?"

She nodded.

The girl thumbed through an almost empty appointment book. "Oh, yes. You can go in now. Room **C**."

She poked her handbag under her arm and set off down the inner hall. Room **B**, room **C**— Should she knock? Ridiculous. She turned the knob and went in.

The room was tiny. There was a single chair—a sort of dentist-type chair and a console. In one corner of the room at eye level, a camera lens eyed her. She smiled at it self-consciously.

SIGN IN PLEASE. TYPE YOUR NAME ON THE CONSOLE. I CAN UNDERSTAND YOUR VOICE, BUT PROPER NAMES MUST BE ENTERED.

Her hands grew sweaty. She reached in her bag for the limp tissue and patted her fingers.

WAITING.

She typed, "Marilyn Taylor," then sat back, resting her fingers in her lap. They were covered with lipstick which had globbed all over the Kleenex. She looked at the console. Sure enough, there were streaks of "Coral Melon" on the keys.

"I'm awfully sorry." She dabbed at the console with the remains of the Kleenex, leaving flecks of itself glued to the console. With what was left, she wiped unsuccessfully at her fingers.

TELL ME WHAT IS BOTHERING YOU, MARY-LINE, it said in a fatherly tone.

"It's Marilyn. Well, you see, a lot of things bother me. Just a lot of things."

A LOT OF THINGS BOTHER YOU, MARY-LINE?

"It's Marilyn. Well, yes. I just don't seem to have any self-confidence."

YOU DON'T HAVE ANY SELF-CONFIDENCE.

"You're right. I don't." She twisted the remnant of tissue and rent it in two.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO LIE DOWN, MARY-LINE?

"Lie down? You want me to lie down?"

YOU MIGHT BE MORE COMFORTABLE IF YOU LIE DOWN.

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She looked wildly around the tiny room. "How?" Did it want her to lie down on the floor?

SLOWLY PRESS THE FOOT PEDAL ON YOUR CHAIR, MARY-LINE.

There was a small lever near her right foot. She mashed it with her heel. The back of the chair collapsed while the base rose abruptly, catapulting her into a supine position. Her heel seemed to be caught in the lever. With a yank, she pulled it free leaving a millimeter of shoe leather behind.

ARE YOU COMFORTABLE, MARY-LINE?

"Oh, yes," she lied. The chair was slick and hard and from her new position the ceiling lights glared down in her eyes.

It was awful lying there like that. It was as if she were on display for all to see and— Oh, God. She was being intimidated by a damned machine. And yet, its voice was so human. So fatherly. . . . She began to speak. "I've always been self-conscious."

YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN SELF-CONSCIOUS.

"Yes. Ever since I was a little girl." She shut her eyes against the bright lights. "I remember I was in the first grade and I was supposed to be a spring flower. I think I was a rose."

YOU WERE A ROSE, MARY-LINE?

"A tea rose, I believe. Anyway, all the spring flowers had to dance on the stage. My mother made me a beautiful costume out of pink crepe paper and I put it on. My mother was in the audience and the spring flowers were in the hall waiting to go on stage when Hymie Rittenhausen, who was in the third grade, came by and stuck out his tongue at me. Then he went to the water fountain and got a drink. I knew something was up when he came back with his cheeks all puffed out like a chipmunk. He sprayed a whole mouthful of water over my costume."

HE SPRAYED WATER OVER YOUR COSTUME.

"Yes, he did. And then Mrs. Gautier began playing the piano and we all went out on the stage. She was playing 'Humoresque.' You know, it goes, 'Dum-de-dum-de-dum-de-dum-dum,' and I began to dance with my partner who was a daffodil." Marilyn gave a little shudder and then she said, "Do you have any idea what happens to crepe paper when it gets wet?"

WHAT HAPPENS TO CREPE PAPER WHEN IT GETS WET, MARY-LINE?

"It falls off of you, that's what. In front of God and the world it falls off of you and leaves you standing on a stage with nothing on but your little ruffled panties."

She squeezed her eyes shut at the memory. "I've always hated 'Humoresque' ever since."

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YOU'VE ALWAYS HATED HUMORESQUE.

"Wouldn't you? That's when it all began. Ever since then, things have been falling off of me. Snaps come open, straps break. Once," she said darkly, "part of my bathing suit fell apart and floated away."

IT FLOATED AWAY.

"You've got to help me."

I'VE GOT TO HELP YOU, MARY-LINE.

"Oh, thank God you said that. Something has got to be done. I just can't go on like this. Take today, for instance. Just today I ate too much. And I broke a fingernail. And I tore my hose."

YOU TORE YOUR HOSE?

"Yes, see." She waggled her foot in the direction of the scanner. "My toe is sticking out."

YOUR TOE IS STICKING OUT.

"Yes. Oh, Doctor— May I call you, Doctor? I mean, I know you're not a *real* doctor, but I need to call you that."

YOU NEED TO CALL ME DOCTOR.

"Yes. I really do. You don't mind, do you? Anyway, there I was waiting for the elevator and my toe was sticking out. It was horrible."

YOUR TOE IS HORRIBLE?

"It was awful. Oh, Doctor, why am I different from other people?"

The machine reflected. YOUR TOE IS HORRIBLE. YOU ARE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PEOPLE.

"And my stomach— You see, I had garlic bread on top of an antipasto—a large antipasto—and I had the spaghetti with meat sauce and mushrooms. Well, my stomach bulges—"

YOUR STOMACH BULGES.

She nodded. "I didn't need the large antipasto. I didn't even want it. . . . And then my lens fell out."

EXPLAIN, PLEASE. WHAT IS LENS?

"Lens. In my glasses." She searched for an analogy. "It's like your scanner. My lens fell out."

YOUR LENS FELL OUT!

"Yes. Onto this pale-eyed man in the elevator who said I had garlic-breath."

EXPLAIN, PLEASE. WHAT IS GARLIC-BREATH?

"It's when you eat garlic, which is an herb. When you breathe out, you have garlic-breath."

YOU HAVE GARLIC-BREATH, MARY-LINE.

She sighed. "I do."

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The machined whirred and then it said, YOUR TOE IS HORRIBLE. YOU ARE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PEOPLE. YOUR STOMACH BULGES. YOUR LENS FELL OUT. YOU HAVE GARLIC-BREATH, MARY-LINE.

She began to giggle. Put that way it was quite ridiculous. The giggle turned into a laugh, and the laugh, a howl. After all, what was so awful about her toe anyway? It was an ordinary toe. And *anybody* who ate what she'd eaten would have temporary stomach-bulge and garlic-breath too. As for the lens— It was really sort of funny— "Oh, Doctor," she gasped between peals of laughter, "I can't tell you how you've helped me. You're so objective. You're exactly what I needed." She reached out and patted the machine appreciatively on its console.

A bell rang. TIME IS UP.

She rose to her feet and wiped a tear of laughter from her eye with one finger (the one with the broken nail). "Thank you again, Doctor. Even if you're not real!"

She'd really been entirely too self-conscious, she mused as she waited for the down elevator. Too inhibited.

She gazed at her toe, pallid as a water lily against the suntan-beige. It was symbolic, really. A symbol of the real Marilyn trying to shed her constraints and emerge naked and beautiful into the world.

It was really quite sexy.

The analogy struck her as an elegant one. Her toe represented the leading edge of a fragile butterfly struggling to emerge from its stifling chrysalis.

The elevator doors whisked open. She entered and stood next to a man with soft brown eyes that had laugh-crinkles at the edges. She took a deep breath, then turned to him boldly and said, "Hi."

"I'll bet you like Italian food," he answered.

She looked at him under her lashes. "You should try my lasagna." Her pale toe pulsed in the fluorescent ambience. "You'd love it," she murmured.

His eyes widened, then crinkled. "Would I really?"

"I'm sure of it. How about tonight?"

Shoulders touching, they leaned together and looked at one another. A smile began to play on his face reflecting the smile on hers. Then they began to laugh.

"Why not?" he said.

Back at Allied Meditronics, Psychotherapy Dept., the machine whirred in confusion. It had not been programmed to deal with

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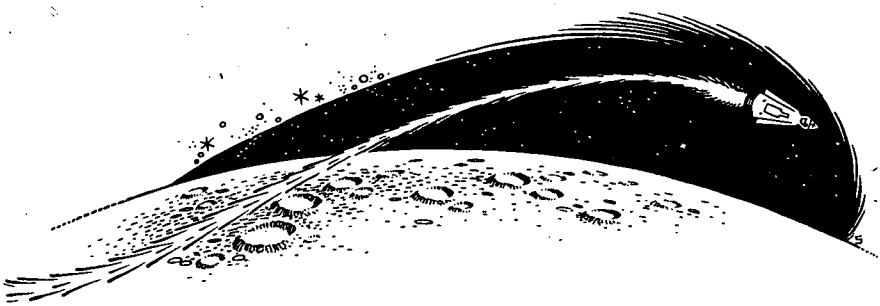
aliens—aliens with horrible toes, bulging stomachs and garlic-breath. It wasn't even a real doctor.

Its keys felt sticky.

A thought pecked at its circuits and hatched into life: WHAT IF ITS LENS FELL OUT?

Whatever was it going to do?



SECOND SOLUTION TO THE BACKWARD BANANA (from page 91)

The paragraph contains every letter of the alphabet except *e*, the last letter of "time."

Now go back and study the original narrative. Somewhere in the text is a block of letters which taken forward spell the last name of a top science fiction author who has written about time travel. There may be spaces between letters, as for example in the word "fat" that is hidden in the second sentence of this paragraph. After you find the last name, look for another sequence of letters in the narrative which taken *backward* spell the same author's *first* name. What is the full name?

The solution is on page 109.

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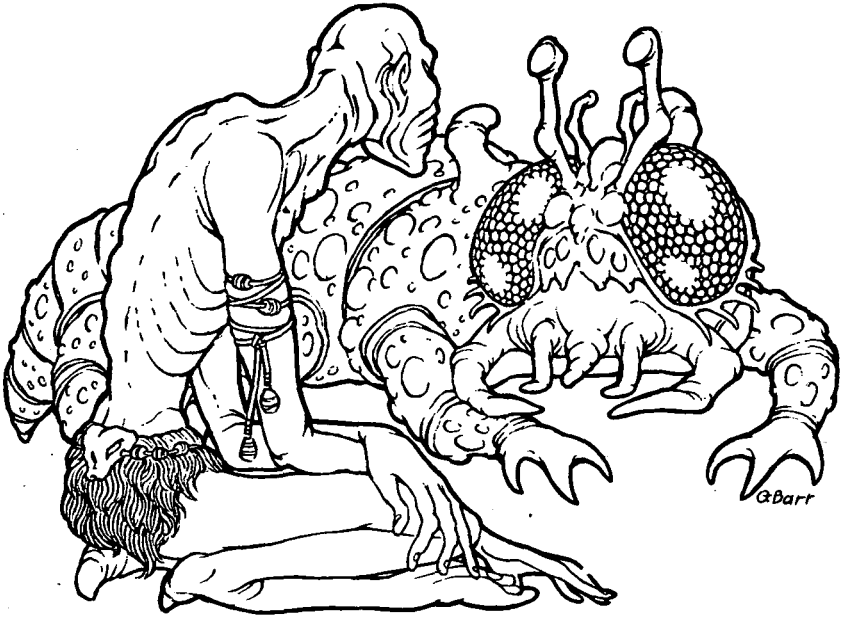
THE MAN IN THE ROVER

by Coleman Brax

art: George Barr



Werner Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle is the spoilsport of the physical sciences; it states that one cannot observe an event without changing it. Is it too much to suppose that the Principle might apply to the social sciences as well?

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It was the evening of the last day of his Observership on Lonmustr. By now, the insect-shaped rover was second nature to Hodween. At least once a day for the past one hundred days he had crawled through the narrow opening and settled himself into the prone position that the rover required. Under his control, the ship's roverplant had done a fine job of producing a vehicle that closely resembled a local life-form. But after tonight, the craft would be needed no longer. Its components would be fed back into the roverplant, would become materials for some other mission.

What was more significant to Hodween was that the next mission would not be his. He was about to complete his tour of duty as an Observer. After two years and six worlds of watching, he would be deemed ready for the real work of the Service. He would be given a Contact assignment. He would become a representative of the Consortium, and would confer as an equal with some alien race.

The rover cushioned him silently as its jointed legs sprinted across the plain. The infraviewer showed clear passage in the direction of the smoke he had detected earlier. He had hopes that there would be something out of the ordinary to record that evening, something to cap his mission with a final success. He had witnessed a number of Lon campfires, but there had never been more than two or three of the creatures present at any one time. On these occasions, the interactions among them had been confined to the sharing of food.

Yet, scavenging by day, he had occasionally come across the remnants of huge fires. These, he suspected, had been gatherings of significance, from which something might be learned about the cultural development of the Lons. The quantity of smoke he was now detecting suggested that he might at last be approaching one of the large fires in action.

He halted the craft at the top of a low hill. Something was brewing below him, something of considerable size. He reached for the video controls; his fingers momentarily seemed awkward on the knurled levers. Then he zoomed in on the center of activity. Yes, there it was, a large crowd of Lons gathering about a fire. From several directions others approached on foot. Each carried a load of logs that it tossed onto the flames upon its arrival.

This is what Hodween had been hoping to find. Despite the climate control, he began to feel perspiration dripping along his ribs.

The fire was in the midst of a bowl-like depression. There were no boulders or shrubs nearby that could be used for cover. He would not be able to conceal the craft as he moved it towards the Lons.

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Ordinarily, they paid little attention to him, as the creatures the craft emulated were not harmful to the Lons. But for this occasion, they might wish to be alone. The Lons had been known to throw stones, and there were enough Lons and stones below to give Hodween something to worry about.

"H to base," he said into the comport at his lips. "I count about eighty natives. Should be worth going in."

"Base to H," answered Dosset from the ship. "Looks like one of those biggies you've been theorizing about."

"Looks like it."

"We haven't seen such a crowd in action. Better watch yourself." Dosset's tone of voice suggested something other than concern.

"O.K., O.K., Mother Dosset. And tell me you're not a wee bit jealous."

"You can stuff eggs, Hodween. If you think this is gonna get you a plush assignment, you're bozo."

Hodween grinned. There *was* a touch of jealousy in Dosset's voice. Nobody knew for sure if there was a relationship between the quality of Observations brought back and the desirability of one's first Contact assignment, but there were other possible benefits. Many an Observer saw his name find a permanent niche in the socioterminology. Phrases such as Lenfant barter, Matsuyama constructions, Pilkakking meditation poses, had entered the language in just that way. Hodween would not have been averse to such a chance for immortality.

"Hey, Dosset," Hodween said, lowering his voice despite the soundproofing of the craft. "I've got to check something before going down. I'm getting a reading." By the time he finished talking, he had flung the video back to a panoramic view. His instrument was registering a nearby presence, but he couldn't see it.

"Getting cold feet?" Dosset asked, in a slightly disparaging tone.

"Nuts. There's something up here. Didn't you notice?" Dosset was supposed to be monitoring the mission on an identical set of instruments.

"Faint signal. Must have missed it."

"O.K., keep your eyes open now, will you? I'm going to try to get closer to it." Hodween steered around the small ledge to his left and approached the unseen heat source. Then he could see that there was something propped against a rock. He stopped the rover as soon as he had a clear line of sight to the questionable object.

"It's one of them," said Hodween. "A Lon. Probably hurt. Don't know if its night vision's good enough to see me."

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"I think it is at this range," said Dosset with little interest.

The creature was bipedal, with a long neck that tapered out to become a long, hairless head. It had a pair of thin, oblong eyes and a row of slits for eating and breathing. Hodween had spent so much time looking at Lons that this one seemed as familiar-looking as a friend.

"I think it's hurt," Hodween said. "Maybe a broken leg. Looks like it set itself up to face the fire. That's probably where it was heading."

"Could be. But watch yourself, Hodween. Don't get any stupid ideas." This time Dosset's voice was dead serious.

"I know. I know." On an Observation planet, contact was strictly forbidden. Involvement of any kind with the natives was a major breach of Consortium rules. It was deemed essential that these planets follow their own courses of development; any contact with advanced races was bound to send shockwaves through the indigenous cultures.

Nonetheless, Hodween moved closer to the seated figure. It was swathed about the middle with a pelt; the upper part of its torso was intricately painted. Hodween had never before seen the use of body paint on Lonmustr. He flipped his telescopic view back towards the Lons by the fire and saw something he hadn't noticed earlier. Several of them were also painted and were wearing pelts similar to that of the wounded Lon. By their behavior, it appeared that these were more important than the others. The painted ones were lined up with arms linked and with their backs towards the fire; the others were seated on the ground before them.

Hodween returned his attention to the creature by the rock. The others were waiting for it, he decided. Would they send out a search party or would they conduct the meeting without it? The Lon seemed to be struggling to its feet. It pulled itself up by reaching for handholds in the rock along its back. Its face showed a strain that erupted into a shrill cry as it tried to put weight on the hurt leg. Then it sank back to its former position and dropped its arms to its side.

"Hodween, what the hell are you doing?"

"I'm curious about this one. It's got a special function down there. Looks like it's going to miss its curtain call."

"Well, why don't you get down there yourself, smartass?"

"This one's gonna die out here, I think." Hodween's mouth was dry. He turned his head and pushed for a squirt of water.

"Is that something new?" Dosset said in a cynical tone.

Hodween had seen more than a few natives die in senseless ways, here and on the five planets he'd Observed previously. But for the

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most part these had been deaths demanded by their cultures, such as in battle, or deaths resulting from a widespread environmental condition. Here was a situation he hadn't faced before–one man and one Other, alone. Man capable of aiding the Other.

"You know, there's no way to wipe out a recording," Dosset warned. "If there was . . ." His voice trailed off. After all, his words were being recorded too. Hodween and Dosset did not even *curse* freely while on duty.

"Forget it," said Hodween. His lips felt dry, but he didn't want another drink. "If they have to be that strict about the regs, they can do you-know-what with the Service." As soon as the words were out, he had a hard time believing he'd said them. He'd been dreaming about the Service since he was eight years old. For the past six years, he'd devoted his entire life towards mastering the skills the Service required. And now he was renouncing the whole with a single breath, because he couldn't agree with one regulation.

"I hope you know what you're doing, Hodween." Dosset's voice snapped off.

"I'm just seeing if this one wants a ride. Not much harm in that, I think." Hodween moved closer to the Lon. It noticed him, but seemed not to care. Hodween got closer still, manipulating the craft so that it lay within a few centimeters of the resting creature. Then he flexed the leg joints, lowering the rover's belly to the ground. The Lon seemed mildly interested for a moment, then looked back towards the fire.

Hodween wondered whether the Lon would think to crawl onto the back of the rover. The creatures that the craft was modeled after were docile, but Hodween doubted that the Lons had ever tried to ride them. Hodween tried to attract the Lon's interest by punching for the click-hiss sounds made in imitation of the rover's "brothers." Then he flexed his leg joints, moving the body up and down again. The Lon seemed curious now, but made no attempt to move.

Hodween sent a probe into the ground beneath him, and learned that he was perched on a thick mound of sand. There was another approach he might try, still reasonably consistent with the behavior of the creature he was emulating. He turned the craft, then lowered the rear legs and began to dig in the sand with the front and middle legs. These legs possessed large scoops that were admirably evolved for this purpose. Hodween was tunneling into the sand just to one side of the Lon, undermining its support while positioning himself so the Lon could fall onto the rover's back. Now the Lon started to react strongly to the proceedings. It began to mutter the peculiar

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grunt-cries that Hodween had been listening to for the past one hundred Lonmustr days. Hodween stopped. Frightening the Lon would not do any good.

Hodween lay still and realized that his heart was pounding. The operation of the craft required little physical exertion; it was not his own muscles that had been used to dig into the sand. Nonetheless, he lay there feeling he had just done heavy work.

The Lon, silent now, was flexing several of its face slits. It bent its head close to the rover. Its hand tentatively touched the rover's side. Hodween flipped on an auxiliary camera that was based in one of the tall protuberances on the craft's back. Now he could see the entire top of the rover as the Lon pulled itself towards it. The Lon's good leg was on the inside. It grabbed one of the rover's knobs and thrashed against the ground with the good leg. Hodween could see grimaces that he interpreted to be of pain as the Lon pulled itself forward hand-over-hand. Then, finally, it was aboard, grasping two knobs that seemed ideally suited for Lon "hand"-holds.

"Easy does it," said Hodween as he backed out of the indentation he'd created in the sand. Then he turned the craft slowly until he faced the fire. The Lon began to mutter and cry when it saw that they were heading in that direction. Hodween was concentrating on not bouncing it around too badly. He had not heard a word from Dosset for the past ten minutes, though he knew Dosset was monitoring his every action. He did not really want to talk to Dosset just then.

Hodween piloted the rover carefully down the slope. He kept shifting his gaze from the view of the fire that occupied his main screen to the auxiliary view of the rover's back. The Lon was holding steady. Its friends were not far away now.

Hodween saw no other Lons approaching the fire. It appeared that the meeting was about to start. The central, painted Lons still stood arm-in-arm, staring out at the plain, as if waiting for their missing member. Hodween continued to plod forward, picking his way around the small rocks and shrubs that he would ordinarily simply have walked over.

Suddenly there was a loud shout from the Lon on his back. A chorus of return cries came from the assembled Lons. Hodween stopped the rover. The painted Lons began leaving the fire, leaping over their seated companions to get to the open ground. As soon as the painted Lons were clear of the circle, many of the others joined the rush towards Hodween and his passenger.

They picked the hurt Lon off the rover and tried to stand it up.

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The cries it uttered seemed to convince them at once to abandon the attempt. The painted Lons lowered the hurt one to the ground, then began to gesticulate wildly at each other. While this continued, Hodween found his view was being blocked by the arrival of more Lons. He upped the closest thing he had to a periscope–a whisker-like appendage on the front of the craft.

Then he saw that one Lon had found a straight stick and that another was using a stone knife to cut strips from its garment of pelts. In a few minutes, the two created a splint for the leg of the hurt Lon. They lifted the hurt one between them, and carried it to the special place in front of the fire.

The ordinary Lons returned to the circle and seated themselves on the ground. The painted ones sat down on a bench-like row of logs that Hodween hadn't seen before. There was a rapid return to silence. Then one of the painted Lons began to grunt and wave its arms. It flung its hands outward. It shook its head up and down. It picked up a stone-tipped spear, keeping its shaft parallel to the ground, and lifted it above its head.

Then it passed the spear to the hurt Lon. The hurt one lowered it to its lap. It raised a fist to the sky, and began a series of grunts and guttural sounds. Then it tried to stand up. Two Lons, possibly the ones who had helped it earlier, sprang forward to assist it. They faced it towards the crowd as it began to motion with the spear.

"What do you say, Dosset?" Hodween was grinning now. Although he didn't know what was going on, it was evident that an important form of communication was in progress. Previously, he had only seen the Lons use language to further immediate needs. Now he was witnessing its application to events that were at some distance from them in time and space, perhaps to events that were purely of the imagination. This was an essential step if they were ever to reach for the stars; he felt privileged to be the first to observe it.

Oblivious to Hodween's rover, the Lons continued their ceremony. After all the painted ones had had turns with the spear, the others began to dance. They weaved in and out in a pattern that Hodween couldn't follow. One by one, they peeled off and vanished into the night.

A few, however, headed in Hodween's direction. It was apparent from their gestures that they were interested in the possibility of taking a ride. Noting this, he turned the rover quickly and scuttled back in the direction of the ship. A few natives pursued, but he soon outdistanced them. Then he was alone again, propelling himself across the empty plain. He felt tired but exhilarated. For a short

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while, the excitement of his discovery was more important to him than the consequences of his earlier indiscretion.

He said nothing to Dosset until he was within visual range. "H to base. You still there, Dosset?"

"Ready to receive craft," Dosset replied in a cold tone.

"Coming in." Hodween saw the port flip up out of the ground; he quickly directed the rover inside. After a few more moments, the rover had secured itself in the bay and Hodween was able to back out of it on his hands and knees. He staggered from the bay into the central cabin and dropped onto his bunk.

"So, the hero returns," Dosset said dryly. Dosset, his short black hair neatly brushed back, looked comfortable and relaxed.

There was an odor of cooked food lingering in the cabin. "You ate?" Hodween asked.

"All that chanting and stuff made me hungry. You want anything?"

"A scotch."

Dosset grinned and reached for a non-reg container under his bunk. Alcohol was something the synchef refused to produce for them. Dosset took down two cups from the rack. The cups were the wrong size and shape, but Dosset and Hodween had been away so long that it hardly mattered.

"Here's to Lonmustr," said Hodween as he raised his cup.

"If you say so," replied Dosset.

Hodween swallowed his drink quickly, held out the cup for another as the first warmth hit his stomach.

"Take it easy," said Dosset. "You aren't worried, are you?" He poured Hodween another shot. "I have a friend . . . Casparini. Don't think you know him. Pulled a stunt like yours a couple years back. Interference with a culture."

"What happened?" Hodween asked unhappily.

"They had a hearing. You'll get one too. They'll analyze what you did, take it forwards and backwards and inside-out, try to predict the effect."

"Why bother? If they're going to toss me out, why not just do it?"

"Toss you out of the Service? Not after they've spent all that time educating you."

Hodween looked up from the cup he'd been staring into. "Your friend got off?" he said with sudden interest.

"In a manner of speaking. They gave him a hell of a first Contact assignment. Sent him to some place where the natives only sleep once every seventy-two of our hours . . . and kill anyone who's im-

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polite enough to do otherwise."

"Just my style." Hodween leaned back against the bulkhead. "So you think that's what I'll draw? A miserable first assignment?"

"Nothing worse. After all, you didn't hand the Lons a tachyon drive."

Hodween laughed. "They'll get it for themselves. Give them time and they'll build one of their own."

At that moment, in the vicinity of the campfire, groups of natives were pursuing the insect-like creatures that the rover had imitated. A few daredevils were already taking their first rides. For the Lons, these were the opening hours of the Era of Transportation.

THAT SETTLES THAT

Gentle Reader, you may wonder: Why
Isn't SF the same as sci-fi?
Well, you see, there's a fine line
Between Robert Heinlein
And *Son of the Two-Headed Fly*.

—F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre

THIRD SOLUTION TO THE BACKWARD BANANA (from page 100)

The author is Isaac Asimov. Both names are in the sequence of capitalized letters in the sentence that starts: "BianCA, AS I MOVe these levers, . . ."

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GOOD FENCES

by Juleen Brantingham

art: Jim Thomas

For trivia collectors, the author has told us that she is married, with three kids, was born in Ohio, calls Florida home, and currently is in exile in New York State. Further, she says she leads a very dull life, which is why she writes.

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Sometimes Christine Delaney felt as if she were in charge of a zoo. Today was going to be another bad day with the animals. Already she was looking forward to her first Godmother at Casey's Easy Times Lounge. It was only ten o'clock.

She'd been late for work, hadn't been here to prepare the conference room the way Dr. Hewlett liked. Now he was lying down in his office with a sick headache, and Christine would have to cope with the problems that came up until he'd had time to recover.

She had *told* Dr. Gillis what to do. Dr. Hewlett had to have things just so. The shades had to be lowered so the sun wouldn't glare in the great man's eyes. Air conditioning turned up to dispel the odor of those cigars Dr. Gillis smoked in defiance of the rules. And Dr. Hewlett's battle station—agenda centered on the table, the stack of mail to his right so he could look it over while waiting for the staff, to his left the files of those children who were to be discussed. Above the mail a pitcher of water and one glass. He had never used them in all the years Christine had worked here at the school for autistic children, but he roared if they were not in place. Above the files a single ash tray, though Dr. Hewlett did not smoke. He picked things apart: scraps of paper, tissues, lint, and thread from his pockets. All these wound up in tiny pieces in the ash tray, as if a nest-building mouse had been at work. During the course of one tense, over-long meeting Christine had watched him reduce a pencil to a pile of splinters.

His demands were simple, really. The minute Christine had realized that the trouble with her car was going to make her late for work she had phoned the school and asked Dr. Gillis to get things ready.

When she got to work someone told her Dr. Gillis had rewritten the agenda in orange felt tip pen, forgot the mail, and moved the ash tray. With Dr. Hewlett's passion for order it was a wonder he didn't have a heart attack instead of a sick headache. It was all the fault of that Dr. Gillis.

Well, what could you expect from a woman who smoked cigars?

She was smoking one now as she paced the outer office, demanding to see Dr. Hewlett. Ashes were drifting everywhere. Christine nudged the ash tray closer to the edge of her desk without much hope that Dr. Gillis would notice it.

"Dr. Hewlett gave orders he was not to be disturbed," Christine said. "What did you want to talk to him about? It might be best if I spoke to him first." She made the offer knowing Dr. Gillis would refuse. Dr. Hewlett was a brilliant man who ruled the rest of the

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staff tyrannically. But he himself sometimes needed the gentle guidance which Christine knew how to provide. Her power was acknowledged by everyone—except Dr. Hewlett, who wasn't aware of it, and Dr. Gillis, who chose not to believe in it.

Dr. Gillis made a gesture that scattered more ashes. "I'm afraid it's over your head, Christine. It's another one of Andy's ideas. Only this time I think he might have something."

The boy, red-haired, six feet and some impossible number of inches tall, was standing by the door trying to look inconspicuous. He was a teaching assistant, one of those super-dedicated student volunteers the school was blessed/cursed with because they didn't have the funds to hire enough qualified people.

Andy Stoltz was worse than most, always badgering Dr. Hewlett to try some radical new therapy. Last week it had been plastic bags. Andy had decided that autism was caused by a sensitivity to some chemical in the air that acted on the nerves, something that made the children pick up sensory messages from everyone around them. So he'd encased one of the students in plastic and he'd come to Dr. Hewlett to show off his "cure." During their meeting the child began mumbling nonsense syllables and banging his head on the wall. Since then Andy had been quieter than usual.

Christine had a soft spot in her heart for young people, and of the two intruders in her office she preferred the one who wasn't quite sure of himself. But she wished Andy would take his ideas some place else so Dr. Hewlett could stop cringing every time he came into the office.

Lord knows why Dr. Gillis had gotten involved this time. She should know how Dr. Hewlett hated changes.

Christine appealed to the boy. "Why don't *you* try to explain it to me, Andy? Even if Dr. Hewlett agrees with what you want, you'll have to present it to the Board; and most of them know even less about this sort of thing than I do."

He bobbed his head. "Well, you know what the teachers do when one of the kids gets real upset? They put them in isolation. My idea is to take that one step further. I want to build a sensory deprivation chamber. It's a—well, it sort of looks like a coffin. It's soundproof and—"

As she listened Christine had to fight to keep her disapproval from showing. What would Andy come up with next? How about putting dunce caps on them and making them stand in a corner? Poor babies.

"These kids, they can't cope with the world," Andy said. "It's too

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much for them. They're getting all these impressions from people—"

"Now, Andy," Dr. Gillis interrupted, "When we talk to Dr. Hewlett I don't want you bringing up this telepathy theory of yours. I agree your idea has some merit but telepathy is too much for people to accept."

The boy groaned as if in pain. "It's not telepathy," he insisted. "I don't know what to call it but it's not that. All the things they do—rolling their eyes and self-stimming and pounding their heads on the walls—it's like they're trying desperately to concentrate on just one thing, even if it's only pain."

Like pinching yourself to forget a toothache, Christine thought. What was so hard to understand about that? Dr. Gillis was such a witch. If this thing worked she'd probably use it as a lever to pry Dr. Hewlett out of his job so she could take his place. And of course Andy wouldn't get any of the credit.

"Why don't you write up a memo?" Christine suggested to Andy. "I'll try to persuade Dr. Hewlett to consider it and put it on the agenda for one of the morning meetings."

She would, too, neglecting to mention that Dr. Gillis was involved. It didn't bother Christine the slightest bit that Dr. Gillis glared daggers at her as she left the office.

The day did not improve. There were the usual crises and confusions, threats of resignation, tears, and arguments. Only a mother could have loved these strange creatures, the staff. The children were no problem at all. Christine hardly ever saw them except when called to fill in for a missing volunteer.

It was after six before Christine could get away from the office and then there were errands to run so it was seven-thirty before she made it to the Easy Times, the oasis she had been struggling toward all day.

Eddy was at his station behind the bar, and he began fixing her Godmother before she was half-way across the room. She smiled warmly. Such a nice boy. And good-looking, too. It was a shame he had to wear that ugly, old-fashioned hearing aid, but these days young people didn't pay too much attention to that sort of thing so it probably caused no trouble at all with his social life.

"Good to see you, Ms. Delaney," the boy murmured.

She settled with a sigh onto the barstool. It must be the ambience or something. She felt more at home here than she did in her own apartment.

When she first moved to this part of the city Christine had spent several evenings trying one bar after another. It wasn't that she

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was a heavy drinker, but she needed a place to stop before going home to her cat and her philodendron. Kind of a punctuation mark.

Each bar was as personal as a fingerprint. There were the singles bars and the businessmen's bars and the working men's saloons and the fancy cocktail lounges where ladies stopped for a quick, genteel belt after a day of shopping. None of them was quite what Christine was looking for.

When she found Casey's Easy Times Lounge, Christine knew her search was over. It was a quiet place usually, where people left each other alone. The sign in the window was small, but there seemed to be some subtle signal that attracted the clientele. Sometimes Christine liked to just sit at the bar and watch the others, speculating. There were the ones who looked like they would be more comfortable in uniform and the ones who did wear a uniform of a sort—a shirt pocket stained blue by leaky ball point pens. There were others, scruffy types who never came out of the shadows but passed the word to Eddy that they wanted to see Casey as soon as he came in.

That wasn't the whole of the clientele, of course. There were people who looked like insurance salesmen and others who looked like school teachers, though none of them were on the staff of the school where Christine worked. No one, strange or conformist, was made to feel ill at ease in the Easy Times; and that was what made this bar so unusual.

It was Casey who set the tone of the place, Casey and the people who worked for him. They were unobtrusive, as soft-footed as cats, but always ready to listen when a customer felt like talking. There was something special about the atmosphere, as if it could soak up secrets.

Christine didn't like to burden others with her troubles but this had been a hell of a day. And Eddy looked so sympathetic. He seemed to want to coax the words out of her.

"They're all crazy, Eddy," she confided.

He raised an eyebrow, not quite disbelieving but curious.

"No, really. Mad as hatters. If you could hear what goes on in my office—" Talking was thirsty work. "Another Godmother, Eddy."

Two drinks later Eddy had drifted away to take care of the other customers and Christine was feeling just the tiniest bit sorry for herself. No, not just for herself. For Dr. Hewlett.

He was a brilliant man. Everyone agreed on that, and Christine was never one to argue with people who could put strings of letters behind their names. And he did have a talent for coaxing those

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strange children at least part-way into the real world. But he could be so blind where normal people were concerned—if Dr. Gillis with her cigars and her sly tricks could be called normal.

Why couldn't he see that she was after his job? Why was it he never noticed the way she buttered up the Board members or heard the cutting comments she made to the others when he was speaking to the staff?

Christine could protect him. She had no doubts about that. He was a lamb, really, trotting here and there in response to her hints. But—a little appreciation would be nice—a small gesture once in a while. Did he have the slightest idea how often she kept the Indians from attacking his wagon train?

Only once had he ever thanked her. *Once!* And that hadn't been for her usual job at all but for filling in one morning for a teaching assistant who hadn't showed up.

It was an experience she had tried hard to forget. She'd been at the school long enough not to expect orderly rows of desks with well-mannered students doing sums on paper. But the reality was ten times worse than her previous glimpses through the observation windows.

One girl was sitting at a table, self-stimming—flicking her fingers in front of her face so rapidly they were a blur. Another child was rocking in place, a look of concentration on his face. There was a boy on the floor playing with blocks, circling his body with them like a fence. Not one of the children was having anything to do with another one.

At first Christine didn't see the teacher in this chaos of jiggling, rocking, flicking, humming, and drumming. Then she noticed a pair of legs sticking out of the closet. From the sounds coming from that direction Christine guessed the teacher was trying to soothe a screamer.

Dr. Hewlett hadn't given Christine the slightest idea what to do when she got here, and the teacher obviously could not be interrupted. It was cowardice that helped Christine make up her mind. The boy playing with blocks seemed the most normal, the least frightening.

She had walked across the room to sit on the floor beside him. She spoke to him. She touched him, cupping his chin in her hand, forcing his head up so he would have to look at her. But though their eyes met, the boy wasn't really there. Where *was* he? What was he looking at in his private world?

Shaken but determined not to give up, Christine had taken some

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of the blocks from the arc on the floor and started to build a tower. She was on the third tier when the boy began to whimper.

"What's wrong?" Christine asked, reaching out to touch his shoulder. "Are you hurt? Are you sick?"

On his own the boy raised his head. He looked at her, really *looked*, and Christine felt the beginning of fluttery panic. The boy's eyes—

Later, when she stopped shivering, when she had found some busy-work for her hands, she looked back at the boy with the blocks. His circles were unbroken again.

He was building fences without gates.

She had tried to block out the memory of that day; but even when she could, she was haunted by glimpses of empty eyes. These children were strange, outside her experience, maybe outside human experience. To them, Christine and the teachers were just part of the furniture. The children were alien birds, chirping their unearthly songs, looking at sights she could never see.

On his way out of the office at the end of the day Dr. Hewlett had stopped at her desk. He seemed ill at ease.

"Uh—Christine—I wanted to t— tell you—"

What was it? More work he wanted her to do before she left for the day?

He was playing with pencils, taking them out of the holder beside her typewriter, lining them up like a string of yellow railroad cars. Christine wondered if he was aware of what his hands were doing.

"I-wanted-to-thank-you-for-helping-in-class-today-good-night." He marched out of the office, closing the door so hard that one of his railroad cars rolled off the desk.

Just *once*. And it wasn't about her job or even much of a thank-you. What about all the nights she stayed late? What about all the arguments she settled before he could be bothered by them? What about the good teachers she kept from getting discouraged and resigning? What about Dr. Gillis?

And what was she doing in that zoo anyway?

Someone had started the juke box, and Christine's head was throbbing to a disco beat. The place was filling up, and Casey had come in to help Eddy at the bar. I'll just finish this drink and go home, she decided. She'd had too much to drink, more than she usually allowed herself. She felt tears gathering. It had been that kind of a day, even without the Godmothers.

She looked at Casey, drawing a beer for one of those military types. Casey had a certain look about him, like a pirate or some other kind of adventurer. There had been hints that he'd done some

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pretty strange things before settling down here to tend bar.

Funny. She'd never noticed before that Casey wore a hearing aid, too. Maybe Eddy was related to him. Maybe their hearing problem was some kind of hereditary thing.

Christine rubbed her temples, cursing weakly at disco music, juke boxes, and their father the Devil.

"Would you like an asprin?"

"No thanks, Casey. A little silence would be nice."

The bartender made a face. "It's pretty bad, isn't it? But if I take it out the late-night crowd goes somewhere else. Hey, I have something that should help." He reached under the bar and pulled out a box filled with a jumble of wires, smaller boxes, and ear pieces. "Been working on this for myself. I hate that disco stuff, too. Give it a try and tell me what you think."

"Hearing aids!" Christine laughed. "Casey, I want to shut out that noise not hear it better."

"No, it's not what you think. Here, slip one of these around your ear."

Reluctantly, Christine did as Casey suggested. When he flipped a switch on one of the smaller boxes, a miracle happened. The music was still there. She could hear it—if she wanted to. But it was as if something had been subtracted from it.

"Why, Casey, this is wonderful! What is it?"

He shrugged. "Doesn't have a name. I like to tinker. Used to be my job and I guess I can't break the habit. I hit on this a few months ago. It sets up a counter-irritation to things you don't want to hear, but it's so high you're not aware of it."

Christine didn't pay much attention to his explanation because she was too busy enjoying the peace inside her head. It reminded her of the time she had been in an airport and there was a call for her on the p.a. system. Until the moment she heard her own name she hadn't been aware of the continuous stream of announcements. With Casey's device in her ear, the music from the juke box was no longer calling her name.

Like pinching yourself to forget a toothache.

She found herself staring at the ear piece Casey wore. "Why, there's nothing wrong with your hearing, is there? Or Eddy's."

Casey shook his head.

"I don't understand. The music wasn't playing earlier but Eddy was wearing his hearing aid then."

"Well—" Casey looked slightly embarrassed. "I made a couple of different kinds. The one you're wearing is for music. Eddy's and

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mine are for other things."

"Voices," Christine guessed. For a moment she considered whether or not her feelings might be hurt. It was a close thing. No wonder Eddy was always so sympathetic, so willing to listen.

"Christine, you can't imagine what it's like in here night after night. People come in with stories that would break your heart. The bartender has to listen to all of it. It gets you down after a while. This thing doesn't block out the voices. It just subtracts something, makes them easier to take."

She decided to be forgiving. It helped that Casey was sliding another Godmother across the bar to her. She forgot her decision to leave after the last drink. After all, she'd only had a couple.

"Casey, do you think you could make one of these things that would work on something you couldn't hear or feel yourself?" she asked. She felt as if she had just delivered the Gettysburg Address. It was remarkable how her tongue kept wanting to get tangled up in her teeth.

Casey shrugged. "Might be able to. I'd have to play around with it for a while."

"Come out to the school tomorrow," Christine said. "I'll explain what I need." No use telling him now about the boy with fences and pinching yourself and all that. He might just think it was the Godmothers talking.

Which was ridiculous. Godmothers couldn't talk. Just listen to what they were doing to her tongue.

Of course, she'd have to find a way around Dr. Hewlett. He wouldn't care for the idea of one of his students being experimented on. He was so fussy, him with his papers lined up just so and his yellow railroad cars and his sick headaches.

"Um—Casey, maybe you'd better be ready to make *two* of those things," she said thoughtfully.

It must have been the ambience. It had never been so clear to her before how much Dr. Hewlett was like his students. Or maybe it wasn't ambience. Maybe it was the Godmothers.

It took Casey exactly seven school days to adapt the device he had no name for to the condition that had no name. He worked in an empty classroom, one of several since the budget cuts the year before. At first he worked in secrecy, with Christine wracking her brain to think of plausible reasons for "borrowing" one of the children from class. Later Christine took a few of the teachers into her confidence—well, not exactly into her confidence. She told them it was a new experiment in isolation.

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The hardest part wasn't keeping the secret from Dr. Hewlett, it was keeping it from Dr. Gillis. That woman had her nose into everything.

During those seven days Christine was troubled. There was something—like a word on the tip of her tongue. Something about the danger that someone might not hear his name called.

Silly idea. She really shouldn't have had so much to drink. She swore off Godmothers forever.

On the seventh day Casey came to her office. He had a broad grin on his face and a little boy in tow. For a moment Christine was puzzled. This *was* the boy she had taken from class this morning to help Casey but—there was something different about him. Something in his eyes.

"Go on, son," Casey prodded. "Tell Christine your name."

"B— Billy Wells," the boy stammered, looking up at Casey as if he'd never seen him before. He turned and gave Christine the same sort of look.

Then she knew. His eyes were not empty pools. The boy was really *there,* no longer lost in his alien world. He wore what looked like a hearing aid, with a wire that ran down to his shirt pocket.

"Why, Casey, this is—"

He cut off her congratulations with a wave of his hand. "Billy, can you find your classroom by yourself?" he asked.

When Billy nodded, Casey gave him a push toward the door. He turned back to Christine. "It's not perfect," he warned. "But I think I'm on the right track now. We should start seeing an improvement in these kids."

"You're a miracle worker," she said. "How can I ever thank you?"

He shrugged, looking pleased. "Don't have to," he said. "It's business, and I'll probably make a mint when I get all the bugs worked out." He put another one of his devices on her desk. "Look, you get your Dr. Hewlett to start using this, experimenting with it; and I'll be back in a few days. We can work out our plans then."

So many changes, Christine thought as Casey closed the door behind him. If this thing worked on other autistic children as it seemed to work on Billy, there would be no need for schools like this. Dr. Hewlett would be out of a job—but he would be honored for having been a part of this discovery. People would want him to write books, give lectures. And there would be other problems, other areas where Dr. Hewlett's expertise could be put to good use.

For a few moments Christine was lost in thought.

"Who was that man I saw coming out of here?"

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She looked up, startled. Dr. Gillis. Who else would keep turning up like a bad penny?

"An electrician," she said, scooping Casey's device into a desk drawer and hoping Dr. Gillis wouldn't notice. "Did you want to see Dr. Hewlett?"

"Yes, I have some reports—"

Christine stared at Dr. Gillis thoughtfully, barely listening to her words. When news of Casey's invention got out, news people, teachers, and doctors would flock to the school; and Dr. Hewlett, who was at ease only in his own small, familiar group, would stand back and let someone else do the talking. Who would step in and do it? Who would try to hog all the credit for this discovery?

Still speaking, Dr. Gillis pulled out a cigar and began to light it.

"Please don't do that," Christine said quietly.

Dr. Gillis raised her eyebrows.

"The smoke makes Dr. Hewlett ill. He's too polite to say so, but I'm not," Christine went on, making sure that a little of her anger crept into her voice. "Now if you'll leave your reports with me I'll see if he has time to look at them." Her tone left no doubt that Dr. Hewlett would not bother with trivia.

Dr. Gillis straightened her shoulders, glared at Christine, and stalked out of the office. When the door closed, Christine allowed herself to smile. It was only the opening gun in the battle but it would do. Now to drop a few hints in Dr. Hewlett's ear.

Christine opened the drawer and reached for Casey's device. As she picked it up that puzzling, tip-of-her-tongue feeling disappeared. She remembered how she had felt in the Easy Times, with Casey's device in her ear. It had been so peaceful, to be able to ignore the annoying music.

If this device truly worked like that one, perhaps Dr. Hewlett wouldn't be such a lamb any more. He might be able to ignore her hints and guidance as she had ignored the music.

She sighed as she dropped it and shut the drawer. It had to be done. But why hurry? It shouldn't take her long to persuade Dr. Hewlett that Dr. Gillis was a disruptive influence and should be asked to resign. Then, when the announcement was made, the right people would get the credit.

Christine reached for the button of the intercom, to begin her campaign. She was smiling again. She always enjoyed these tricky political games.

And after all, no matter what Dr. Hewlett decided to do when this was over, he would need a good secretary.

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THROUGH TIME & SPACE WITH FERDINAND FEGHOOT V!!!

by Grendel Briarton

art: Tim Kirk

In the fifth year of the reign of Hamid al-Hazred XXVII (Hamid the Insufferable), the planet Mars was kidnapped bodily out of the Solar System. All the mullahs and every dissident element at once started screaming, and the distraught Sultan turned to Feghoot for help.

"Imagine it, Feghoot Bey!" he bellowed, rending his beard. "I spend trillions of piastres terraforming that planet, installing planet heaters, even a substitute sun—and these miserable mullahs accuse *me* of stealing it—of turning it into my private seraglio! I've tried impaling them and drowning them in the Bosphorus—and it does no good at all. If you can prove to them that someone else did it, you can have any reward you desire!"

"Five hundred Circassian virgins?" Feghoot asked modestly.

"I'll write out the requisition at once!"

Feghoot smiled. "Merciful Majesty, the real culprits are your ancient enemies, the Russians. A secret Russian underground group known as The Brotherhood has been plotting the dark deed for ages. They've even boasted about it!"

"Give me *proof!*" roared the Sultan.

"That's simple," said Ferdinand Feghoot. "Centuries ago, one of their writers, Dostoievski, actually published a book called *The Brothers Carry Mars Off.*"

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THE MIRROR OF KO HUNG

By E. Hoffmann Price

Art: George Barr

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E. Hoffmann Price was born in Fowler CA in July 1898. He enlisted in the 15th U.S. Cavalry in 1917 and served with that Regiment in the Philippines. He was later appointed to the U.S. Military Academy, graduated in 1923, and became a lieutenant in the Coast Artillery Corps. His first fiction sale, "Triangle with Variations," was followed by crime, fantasy, adventure, and detective stories until the pulps folded, after which he made it as a microfilm technician, wedding photographer, and astrologer. Soon after retirement, he appeared in print again with a series of I-knew-him-when sketches of Lovecraft, R. E. Howard, C. A. Smith, O. A. Kline, Edmond Hamilton, and a dozen other writer-friends he has outlived. He's now at work on a SF novel and a non-fiction work, Foreign Devil in Chinatown. *He is deeply indebted to the many gracious people who have made San Francisco Chinatown a second home for him.*

I.

The girl ignored Carver. She was sizing up the reception area of the Taoist temple, and then, from one flank, the narrow passage between the altar and offerings-table in front of which were kneeling-cushions. Evidently, she was looking for Reverend Dr. Tseng. Being ignored gave the middle-aged Occidental custodian time to envy the well-dressed young man who followed her, and to approve of her choice of a companion. The young man wore a well-fitted blue cashmere jacket, a maroon tie, gray slacks, and black shoes, recently shined.

The young man glanced about, uneasily. His lean face made it clear that he had his doubts about the entire business, whatever that business might be. He was watching the girl to get his next cue.

"Par for Chinatown," was Simon Carver's estimate: he'd become accustomed to seeing the Asiatic female exercise command in her submissive and infallible way.

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At last she discovered Carver.

"Where's Reverend Tseng?"

"He took off for Taiwan last night. Don't know when he'll be back." Carver noted that the eyes became troubled: they were large, very dark, and devoid of the green or blue shadowing somewhat too popular in Frisco's Chinatown. "You had an appointment?"

She nodded. "Adeline Marie Liang. Did he leave a message?"

If seeing a gray-eyed, squarish-faced Foreign Devil wearing the ankle-length blue robe and black hat of a Taoist layman struck her as unusual, her magnolia-blossom mask of loveliness did not show it. Before she could carry on with her inquiry, Carver said, "Sit down. My Buddhist name is Tao Fa. My American name wouldn't interest you. I'm in charge until Dr. Tseng comes back."

The young man brightened. "I'm Sang Chung Li. You're a Taoist apprentice?"

"I like your way of putting it, Mr. Sang. *Novice* would be rubbing in the obvious!" Carver reached for the appointment book on the table near the altar. After flipping a few pages, he paused to say, "Adeline Marie Liang—or do you prefer Liang Lan Yin?"

She stepped up, eyed the page, eyed Carver. "You read Chinese?"

"Miss Orchid Petal—" He grinned amiably. "I do. But if you have a problem, you'd better see an expert."

Lan Yin's glance shifted from Carver to the shrine, with its images of Lao Tzu and the Eight Immortals; it paused on a gilded Buddha, and rose to the glass lanterns and prayer pendants hanging from the ceiling. Of these there were a dozen rows or more, so that they formed a canopy which began at the offerings-table.

"If you have to have a wish lantern, try somewhere else."

For the first time, warmth glowed in Lan Yin's eyes. "You could have offered me the twenty-five-dollar size."

The most dangerous of Asiatic women is the one who builds up, insidiously, so that the girl watcher admits that she's nice enough looking—and then, that she has an air of quiet distinction—next, exquisite bone structure—and then the fatal dive, as from the Golden Gate Bridge, or the crater rim of Haleakala, or any other spot very high, with no bottom to hit.

Lan Yin, dangerous, let the smile creep from her eyes, to lurk at the corners of a most exciting mouth.

Finally, Mr. Sang spoke. He suggested, hopefully, "Maybe we should go to another temple. Mr. Tao Fa says he's not an expert."

"Lover, that is why I like Mr. Tao Fa." She fingered her brocade handbag. "What's your charge for a consultation?"

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"Ask Dr. Tseng."

Convinced now that she could trust this thirty-nudging-forty oldster, Lan Yin relaxed sufficiently to look as upset as her companion. Her eyes were haunted, troubled.

Carver said, "Maybe the *I Ching* could help you."

"I need more than the Book of Oracles! There's something that has to be done before I waft away and don't come back. I've been stepping out of myself and prowling in a dream world!"

"Blacking out at her desk," Mr. Sang added. "She finally got herself on the unemployable list."

Lan Yin said, "We're awfully serious about each other. Now we don't know where or which way we're going. I don't have to work. Chung Li can and does. But for marrying, I'm no good! It'd be a disaster for us both."

Carver reached for the phone. "I know an herb doctor. He's—"

She caught his wrist. "This is something psychic—I'm hexed—hoodooed! Someone—something is reaching for me. It began in ordinary sleeping dreams, then, those blackouts. It's trying to separate us."

"That's bad *joss*," Carver said, sympathetically. "Bad joss." Then, with a sharp snap, "Who's wishing Chung Li'd drop dead?"

"Why—no—"

"Don't tell me, *no one!*" Carver grinned amiably. "Level off, or take this to another parish. You don't want to know what to do—you're interested in how to settle an enemy, and my guess is that you know pretty well who it is."

"But we don't know what. Nor who. That's why we wanted to have Dr. Tseng consult the *I Ching*."

"Chung Li—Lan Yin—Orchid Petal—I don't know whether the Reverend Dr. Tseng actually headed for Taiwan or not, and I couldn't care less. My feeling is that he wanted none of this problem—too hot—too hot even for diddling around with the yarrow stalks!

"You better go to the temple at 146 Waverly Place. Maybe you'll end up realizing you need a Taoist magician, with mirrors, and spirit sword of peach-wood, and all the rest. For a fight, not a talk. Me, I'm no *tao shih!* But I'll be studying on it. Now, let me offer you some tea."

He got the tiny cups of white jade. From a vacuum jar he filled the antique jade pot. This was not a refreshment. It was Carver's formal permission for Lan Yin and her fiancé to take leave.

Lan Yin's words told him of her appreciation. Her eyes told Carver that he'd not seen the last of her.

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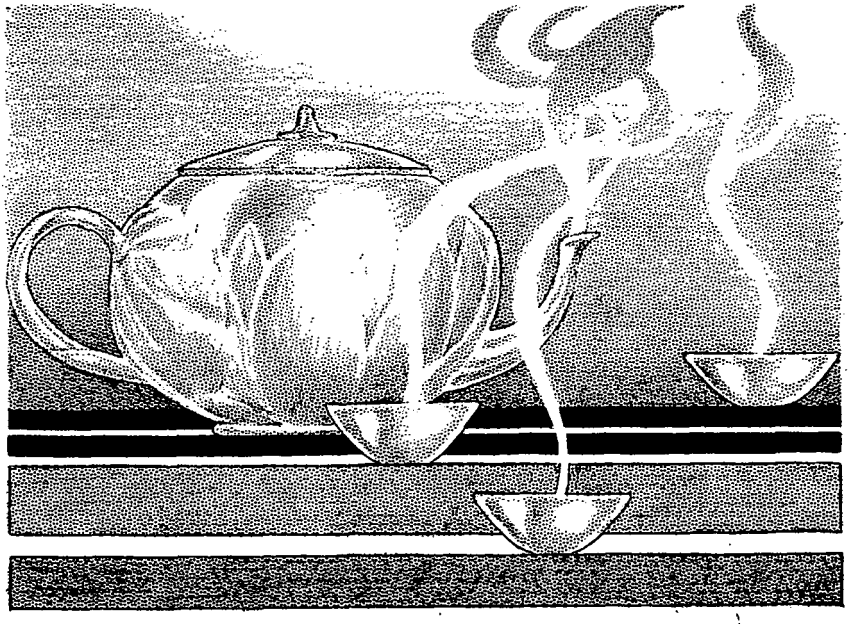

What nagged him, that evening and all the following day, was the conviction that he'd seen that couple before. He enumerated the temples, the art galleries, the visitor-groups. He knew that he'd never had words with either, else he'd have remembered them; or at least, Lan Yin.

Routine visitors interrupted his cogitations from time to time. Some came to fire up joss sticks for the altar. Others left offerings of fruit, rice wine, roast duck, or roast pork. All kowtowed. Some cast divining lots, and consulted the book. When they left, and with a favorable answer, they put cash into the contribution box. This was for Dr. Tseng, and for temple upkeep.

It was understood that Carver would eat the food on the altar. The incense fumes were for the Immortals. Something for everyone. Behind the façade of what Foreign Devils termed superstition was an ancient philosophy and this was what engrossed Carver. He paid his way by doing temple chores. At meals, Dr. Tseng briefed him. During his solo hours, Carver studied Chinese texts.

Taoism was whatever you wished to make it: alchemy —divination—esoteric wisdom—the wiring diagram of the Cosmos—pure-strain fortune telling—it had given Zen that which made

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it different from other Buddhisms. And, there was the Mirror Magic of Master Ko Hung, who had summed up his experience in a book, the *Pao P'u Tzu.*

After a glance at his watch, Carver dialled a well known number. The girl who answered spoke Americanese with Chinese-Hawaiian intonation. Carver said, "Hi, darling. Uncle Tao Fa."

Sally Wong took ten minutes to tell about the bitchiness of her supervisor at the office. Next, she wondered how her adopted uncle had been faring. Finally he got to the point: "If you happen to know anyone who happens to know something about a girl named Liang Lan Yin and her boyfriend, Sang Chung Li, I'd be awfully interested. She's about your build and age, stacked up like you, only not as beautiful or charming."

"That last is what you always call Chinese manure."

"Would I have adopted a niece who wasn't gorgeous and talented?"

"I adopted *you,*" she reminded him. "What'll I find out?"

"Just about everything. Is she Catholic or Christian? What are her hobbies? How does she spend her weekends, and who with? Who's she sleeping with, and who's trying for a turn?"

Carver had long been convinced that each of Chinatown's 60,000 Asiatics knew all about the other 59,999.

Presently, he looked at the burnished bronze of a mirror somewhat more than a foot in diameter. It sat in a crescent carved of teak, which was mounted on a teak pedestal. During the past year, Carver had learned that a trained eye could see unusual images, which were not always reflections of objects in front of the mirror. There was something peculiar about its curvature. However, the curvature was so slight that he had no ground for considering it spherical instead of elliptical, parabolic, or hyperbolic. He fancied that it might be one which was not even included in the appendix of *Granville's Differential & Integral Calculus,* which gave the equations of some downright eerie curves.

Having picked his way through the booby traps of the *Pao P'u Tzu,* he was ready to give the mirror a work-out, his first step toward looking into what Lan Yin and Chung Li had stirred up.

Before he settled down to looking, Lan Yin came to the temple door, alone. Although this did not amaze him, he had not expected her to bring a week-end bag.

"Long time no see. Mr. Sang—will he be up later?'

"I hope not!"

"That's an interesting start," he conceded. "Where have we met before?"

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"We haven't."

"Mmmm . . . how long've you been in Chinatown?"

"I came in from Hong Kong two years ago."

"Wait a *minute!* No one ever learned Americanese-English in any two years."

"I was born in China. We had American neighbors, a missionary family. My dad said to me and my brother, 'Mr. and Mrs. Baker are awfully nice people, but they're not converting anyone at all. That makes them unhappy. You youngsters go over and become Christians. It'll please them a lot, and you needn't believe their nonsense!'

"So, we learned Americanese from them, and from their son and daughter, when they came back with newer States-talk."

"That adds. And the other day, you made a check-up to see if you really ought to buy me?"

"Well, yes, of course, but it wasn't so awfully necessary. I'd heard you have an adopted niece who calls you Uncle Tao Fa. Mind if I call you that? Lots nicer than 'Mr. Carver'."

"OK, providing you tell me who and what troubles you."

"What I want is to have you build up protection against devils and spirits. Recite mantras, chant sutras—oh, anything at all, only do *something!* I'm going wild, I can't take it."

"Five minutes out for chasing devils and then you're off—" He eyed the luggage. "Skiing—surfing—"

"I am mad at Dr. Tseng, so I'm moving in. I'm hiding out till you build up protection for me."

For a moment Carver regarded Lan Yin: a fragile-seeming, pint-size package of woman who, by some ancient Chinese magic, was neither hipless nor flat-chested as a tape line would be forced to indicate: instead, her subtle curves were pure luxury, exciting from understatement.

And elegant legs had been invented in China, along with paper, gunpowder, and the magnetic compass: hers were a demonstration set which she knew better than to conceal with any pants-suit. Instead, the hem of her skirt was *appliqué*, embroidery evidently based on a Persian rug border design, which was sufficiently eye-catching to draw a girl-watcher's gaze from the emerald-jade pendant which reached just to the right area of the vee of a see-more blouse, and thence south of the border—the Persian border—

Her timing was right: "You can't throw me out. I'd kick and scream."

"And people would think I'm crazy, and they'd lock me up."

He went to the phone table, where he got a big card on which was

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lettered BE BACK TOMORROW, and an equivalent in Chinese. This he clipped to the door, and removed the lever from the hand-operated bell. That done, he picked up the bag and headed to quarters in the rear.

"This is the study and utility room. Over that way, kitchen. There's the bath, at the end of the hall." He opened a door. "This is what Dr. Tseng vacated. Be his guest, but take my room and I'll take his. That way, if he comes back unexpectedly, he won't have any treats he doesn't rate. I'll be making fresh tea while you check your make-up and decide how much to hold out when you tell me all."

He turned on the speed burner. He found almond cakes, a couple of Moon cakes. When he came out with a pot of tea, she was waiting.

"Remember, you wanted me to see an herb doctor? That was nice. Not suggesting a psychiatrist."

"Boyfriend has?"

"Mmmm . . . well, not in so many words."

"Chung Li's not too happy about your digging for answers—now that he's not here, give me your private guesses—"

He stopped short. He was talking to a dummy. Her expression was vacant. Her cup dropped from limp fingers. Her mouth gaped. The eyes stared. All the while, she had been folding, sliding slowly, legs reaching out, heels raking the rug. Finally she sagged enough in the middle to check her motion.

So—this was what she'd been telling him about. Carver, though warned, fought off panic. He took her wrist, but could make nothing of her pulse. He listened to her breathing. All in all, no need for first aid. Carver got the mirror from the Shrine Room. Stepping behind the low back chair, he lowered the mirror. There was no image, neither of her face nor of his own.

The metal was not fogged from her breath. Mists seemed to swirl as though behind the polished surface. He decided not to wait for the mists to become recognizable shapes. He set mirror and pedestal on the table. The metal was bright again.

Carver scooped Lan Yin from the chair and stretched her out on the lounge. Seating himself well away from her, he regarded the polished metal. His reflection was clear and normal.

Between Lan Yin and the Mirror of Ko Hung, Carver had enough to keep his cogitation department busy for some while to come . . .

§ § §

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II.

Although Carver was certain that the mirror itself was no menace, he was wary of what lay behind it. During the moments of looking into it, as he stood behind Lan Yin, he had had the feeling that hyper-space had been drawing him into a vortex. This had not been physical: it had been a peculiar eye-glazing compulsion to take a mental dive. He recollected that whenever Dr. Tseng had permitted himself to be baited into talk of the mirror, he'd been evasive.

Kicking off his shoes, Carver seated himself cross legged in his chair, the Chinese monk's habitual posture. Being lean and wiry, he found the half-lotus seat easy enough. Sitting with spine vertical, head level, he "followed" his breathing in the Taoist mode. His eyes, however, were not closed. Master Ko Hung had described a non-visual perception akin to that of the blind swordsman who won every duel because *he saw with his mind*—a direct perception. Although regarding the mirror, Carver did not anticipate that he would "see" images in it. Instead, he might get impressions, awarenesses, such as those which Lan Yin was getting during her sojourn in blackout land. All this might be like Zen or, as the Chinese called it, Ch'an meditation, during which one got no specific knowledge whatsoever: but one's capacity for knowing increased itself, expanded enormously.

He had to avoid reaching, grasping, greed for the specific. *Seek and ye shall find* was the way of children, the way of fury and frustration. The seeker names what he seeks. By defining, he limits, he restricts and makes it unreal, destroying before he finds.

The jangle of the phone jerked Carver from the first stage, that of neither withdrawing nor of *not*-withdrawing. Sally Wong was on the line.

"Uncle Tao Fa! I got something for you."

"OK, let's have it."

"She's all the time with the man you mentioned, nobody else. Oh, yes, she was born in Hangchow. Studied to be a Buddhist nun, but never cut her hair."

"Huh! Got sour on religion?"

"Oh, no, Uncle Tao Fa. Got soured on sleeping alone. Let me see—oh, yes, parents dead, one brother living. Used to work for Pacific Coast Insurance. Belongs to underground music society."

"What's that? *Underground*—"

"Not political. It is in a basement." She gave an address on Clay Street, between Grant and Brenham Place. "Classical stuff. No folk

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music, no modern, and no opera crap—really *good* music."

Sally ran out of words and breath. Carver asked, "How'd you get all that dope in such a short while?"

"I know a marriage broker. They know more about girls than the girls know about themselves or each other."

"Mmmmm—well, if I ever want the low-down on you, I'll know how to check up."

"You'd have to pay an *eee*-normous sum of money. And I tell you confidentially, you don't need a broker go-between these days. Just marry your doll, or find a spot on Concubine Alley for shacking up. Her boyfriend—nice fellow, but too young, she'd go for a grown man."

"You and your low mind! I'm not interested in her."

"So much briefing because of no interest."

"Sally, you're a little hellion."

"Oh, yes, always hellish. Old custom. Good bye, Uncle Tao Fa."

Carver got back to his mirror experiment. He'd not reached the first phase of balance when he heard a stirring, a gasp, an exclamation. Lan Yin was busy sitting up and also trying to get her skirt down over her knees. She would have succeeded if the colorful *appliqué* which began at the hem-line and went up had instead been arranged to lengthen the skirt.

Then her eyes focused. "Ah—how long—I was gone—gone—"

"Look into that mirror right now—please!"

Still dazed, she obeyed. Carver glanced over her shoulder. For an instant, the metal was misty, and her features, vague and wavering. Then they solidified, looking through a faint haze. In a moment, the reflection was normal.

After pouring her a cup of tea, Carver told Lan Yin of Master Ko Hung's magic. He concluded, "Some of his mirrors reflected what a person actually was, and didn't show what the eye saw. When you blacked out, *you* weren't present, so your visible body didn't show. What was it like, wherever you were?"

"Like being in all directions at once, everything fuzzed up, all distorted, like in modern paintings."

Carver turned to a desk from which he took some eight-by-ten glossies. He thrust them into her hands. Sally's mention of the classical music society had touched off a chain of recollection.

"Reverend Dr. Tseng with the *k'in*," Carver began. "Mr. Sang Chung Li, with the *san hsien*. Miss Orchid Petal, with the *p'i p'a*. And who's the good looking man with the intense eyes, the heavy brows—a *p'i p'a* player, too."

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Miss Orchid Petal didn't know what to say.

"See why I thought that you looked familiar? And I think I am not far off the beam when I say that since Dr. Tseng knows at least two of the cast, he wants no part of your problems. And none of Chinatown's Taoist masters want any of the action. A matter of courtesy, let's say."

"The one you didn't name is Kwan Tai Ching. He and Sang Chung Li have been friends for years. They're sworn brothers. I can't, I mustn't cause trouble. In the end, they'd remain brothers, and I'd be the loser."

"Each wants you, and for keeps. And Kwan Tai Ching has put an expert *tao shih* on the job—you're unemployable already, and next move, you'll be unmarriageable—except to Kwan," he summed up. "So, I'm the apprentice magician to chase the devils away. Either break up Kwan's game that way, or—"

"You do understand!"

"I ought to! Some close Chinese friends tell me things that the standard foreign devil never hears."

"Devil," Lan Yin resumed, "is just right. You use the word our way, not the way missionaries mean it. When I'm insulated, and the force, the power, can't get at me, he'll have to quit." But before he could answer, she went on, "I interrupted you, when you were saying, *'either break up Kwan's game that way, or—'*. Maybe your other way has its points?"

Carver drew a deep breath. He regarded Yan Lin as he had, some minutes earlier, the mirror of Ko Hung: and this, scarcely conscious, was a carry over from his intent scrutiny of the strange surface-depths. Her expression changed, as it would not have because of simple intentness, such as that of Kwan's photographed eye-expression.

"You don't *have* to tell me," she said, hesitantly.

"I might as well. This sworn brother business—or sworn sister, for that matter—is something the West has forgotten for centuries."

"That's why I'm so deadly worried—I never tried to break them up—I couldn't help it—I hate even to think—"

"The other way," Carver said, speaking very slowly, "is for me to take you out of circulation—take you for keeps—brotherhood uninjured, and—"

"Kipling said something—"

"Something about, *but a good cigar is a smoke.*"

Each exhaled a long, sighing breath. They studied each other.

Carver finally resumed, "Relax, Lan Yin. I'll bust my tail, chasing

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devils and following Master Ko Hung's book. Do you still want to stay here?"

"Yes. It's getting stronger. Any time, he'll command me to go to his place, and I'd go. Keep the door locked!"

He caught her by the shoulders, whisked her to her feet. "Now hear this! This is no drill! *We* are getting stronger. And you are going to give me a hand!"

Fumbling in a cabinet drawer, he found a pencil, a piece of chalk, a length of string. He pushed table and rug into a corner. Giving Lan Yin the pencil to hold to the floor as a center mark, he drew a circle, and within it a five pointed star. Lines connecting the vertices formed a pentagon. At one of the sides of this figure he set the mirror of Ko Hung.

Gesturing, he said, "You sit here—I'll sit at your right—we'll both look into the mirror."

Lan Yin shivered. "That mirror—"

"It's the gateway—correction, one of the million-million gateways into Space-Beyond-Space, Time-Beyond-Time."

"Wait, you've lost me already!"

"Welcome to the Ko Hung Club! You and I will get answers."

Carver put a reel into the tape player. He set up three fuming joss sticks at each vertex of the star. In response to his gesture, Lan Yin seated herself, effortlessly, in the full lotus posture.

"Hitch around till you can look my reflection in the eye but without seeing yourself. It's like the wedding picture where the bride looks into the glass, while Mommie fixes the veil. She shows, but the camera that 'sees' both doesn't show in the picture."

"Then what?"

"Keep eyes level. One handicap, nobody to sit at points three-four-five."

"What'd they do?"

"Look along the lines of the star, and chant. You and I don't know the chantings, hence the tape player."

Carver snapped the switch. On one track was the chanting of twenty or more Chinese students. The other brought in the tinkle of a *sistrum,* the *tock-tock-tock* of a "fish-head", the silvery note of a hand bell, all against the deep voice of drums.

Esoteric electronics—the incongruity jarred Carver, but only for a moment. The recorded voices blocked out the more insistent sounds of the city. He intoned his instructions, briefing Lan Yin as he got her and himself in tune with the *thought.* Sound would take care of itself.

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". . . Reach for no-one, reach for no-thing," he droned. ". . . thought comes from no-where . . . thought goes no-where . . . sound not heard is the Way . . . mirror not seen is the Gate . . ."

Lan Yin's mirror-reflected eyes were changing, or Carver's perceptions had changed. Background details blurred and wavered as her eyes expanded. Perspective and distance altered themselves. A swirl of mist filled the circle, obscuring all but the dark fire of her slanting eyes. Carver swayed and regained his balance. With an effort he avoided going headlong to spiral into space.

Finally, he knew that Lan Yin was experiencing what he experienced, if only because he had begun to have perceptions which must be hers. They could not have been his own. Bit by bit, the distinction between him and her became unreal. It flickered out.

No more Lan Yin. The cryptic eyes expanded, to become a single eye. And, no more Carver. Paradoxically, he, whatever or wherever or *when*ever he was, still existed. Although not annihilated, "he" was neither Carver, nor Lan Yin, nor a blend.

It was as though in a lovers' total embrace, each had been wholly absorbed by the other, but without losing identity.

And the music: *that* had never been recorded in that finest of all Chinese temple study-halls, the one on Albany Crescent, just off 231st Street, in the Bronx. Flutes moaned, fiddles wailed, gongs clanged. Chattering blasts of fire-crackers touched off by the bunch, by the long string, masked the music. Mist patterns jumped and jerked from concussion. And then the keening of mourners, professional mourners whose pride it was that not even a stranger just come to town could hear their dirges and not break into tears, then sob, wail, and join the procession.

Dirge of the White Horse: Carver-Lan Yin could not resist the voices that tore at the heart. But the devastating one was *Dew on the Garlic Leaf*, sung only at the burial of exceedingly exalted persons.

A funeral.

A double funeral.

Two brush portraits: youngsters, twelve–thirteen years old, Tang Dynasty, a thousand years ago, judging from the girl's headgear, the boy's robe and cap—dressed for a wedding—no, betrothal—

Time—place—space, interweaving.

He and she, lovely youngsters. They exchanged cups of wine. He thrust two pins into her hair to signify that she pleased him.

Dirge of the White Horse: their funeral procession.

A swirling, a spiralling, a devil's dance of transformation, and

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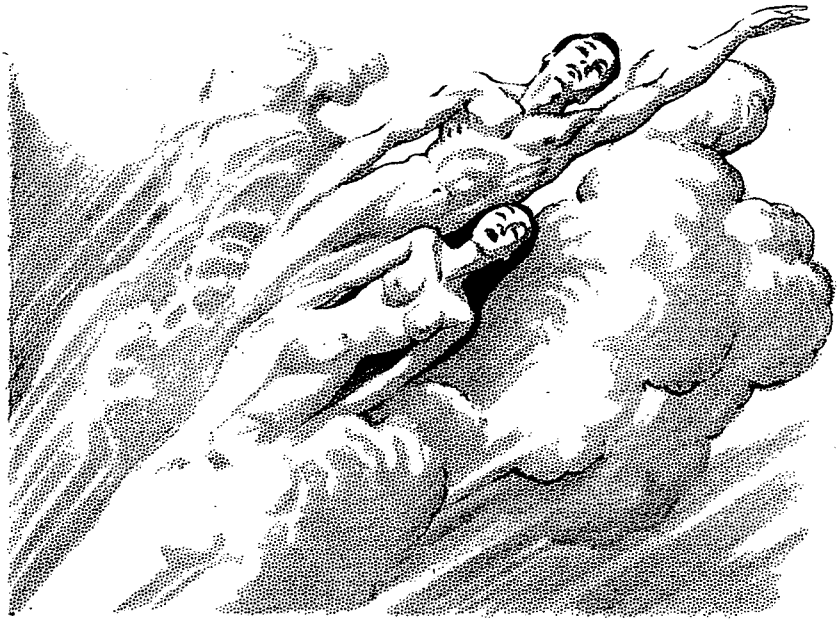

now there's a wedding procession.

The hand-bell and the dirge—

Deadly sadness knifed Carver. The cries of the mourners were his cries. The grief of all the family was his grief. Lan Yin's woe—but that wasn't Lan Yin's funeral portrait. However he was one of the funeral party, she was equally a participant.

What followed was beyond sharing. This was no mirror vision, no projection into Space-Beyond-Space. Lan Yin cried, "Tai Ching!" Her voice tore into Carver's consciousnes. That scream of misery, of uttermost anguish—the sense of returning to his normal space and time made him realize how far he had gone.

The mirror image faded. Carver heard taped music. Lan Yin toppled from her lotus posture. She tried to get up. Carver got to his knees. He caught her under the arms. Kneeling, they swayed, wove, each keeping the other in balance. Then he made it to his feet, and took her with him. She clung to him, sobbing, as he walked her to the lounge.

"I was at my own funeral—*and* wailing for him."

"For Tai Ching, Kwan Tai Ching."

"Yes, but it didn't look like him, and she didn't look like me."

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"Be God-damned!" Carver got no further.

"She should have, he should have looked like me and Kwan Tai Ching. Engagement ceremony—funeral—then wedding." Her laugh was hysterical. "Tao Fa, we're, oh, crazy—"

They clung to each other, mouth to mouth, passionate, incoherent. Their parting was—Carver couldn't imagine which had broken the enchantment. He was certain of nothing except that in another moment, Sang Chung Li and Kwan Tai Ching would have had no woman standing between them and marring fraternal harmony.

Carver indicated the ash on the joss sticks they'd not knocked over. "We weren't gone more than fortyodd minutes, this-earth-time. We were glimpsing your previous incarnation, and I was getting it from you—we're still inter-scrambled, psyches mixed."

"But if I was dead, how could I remember, how see my funeral?"

"Being China-Chinese, you ought to remember that you're never completely out of touch. Body in a coffin, and *you*, watching it all, crying for Tai Ching."

"But I didn't look like me. He didn't look like him."

"Surprising if you had, or if he had. If you got all made up to play Ssu Chun in *White and Green*, you'd not be a Snake Woman, you'd still be Lan Yin. No matter how you looked."

"Now I get it! Everyone is a reincarnation of someone else."

"Lovely Orchid Petal, damn it, NO! You are always you. You were never Lady Wu, or a wealthy merchant's Number One Wife—or anyone else in your past lives. Simply YOU, no tags. The names and bodies were accidental, temporary. My best guess is that the mirror got our psyches so scrambled that we interchanged feelings and thoughts, so I got a peep-in on a life you were reviewing, a playback.

"Whether we were wafting around on the astral plane, or on the akashic plane—" He shrugged. "Just words that Hindus love!"

She regarded the mirror. "That thing is bad joss! Where did we go?"

"Either the mirror is a Gateway, or else Tai Ching has sold you, by hypnotism or otherwise, the idea that you two were married, a thousand years ago. Selling you that during blackouts. He must have plenty of power. He could tell me a thing or two about Taoist magic.

"You quit the music society, after how long?"

"Maybe six months."

"Sometimes Dr. Tseng and Chung Li missed a meeting you made?"

She nodded; a shade of apprehension shadowed her face.

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"And you went to Tai Ching's place for more *p'i p'a* practice?"

"Well, yes. He's awfully talented."

"And before long, you two were in bed. Not at all planned, not by you, anyway, but there you were. You stayed well away, but you found you were being hooked by remote control. I'm not asking you, I am telling you.

"If I really can help you—and don't count too much on me! —I have to know what I'm doing."

A long silence. Then, "You got that from the *I Ching?* Or, you're a psychic, a mind reader?"

He shrugged. "Neither. You and I were pretty much interlaced during our mirror diving. So maybe I just knew, then, and still do."

"Is there anything you can do so I'll be free?"

"I promise you again, I'll bust my tail, trying. Anyway, how do you feel now, after that mirror travelling?"

"A bit twitchy, otherwise, OK."

"Then tell me about Tai Ching's pad. I'll spend some time studying his neighborhood. If I can manage some peep-ins, or listen-ins, I *might*—just *maybe* catch him off base. The more I know about him, the better our chances are. Yes, and this is important—does Chung Li know you're here?"

"No. I said I would go to a retreat to think this out. When you told us that Dr. Tseng had left town, or had pretended to, that was a disaster for Chung Li. What settled him was when we did have a few words with another awfully good *tao shih.*"

"To a retreat. Meditate—recite *sutras*—group chanting —prayer—just for instance, like the spot on Page Street, or way out of town, Tassajara Hot Springs?"

She nodded. "Sort of a true lie—this temple and the way you've done things—this is a retreat."

III.

Narrow, one-way Grant Avenue, the neon-blazing Chop Suey Lane where tourist traps, the "alligator jaws," gape day and night, was a boulevard compared to Carver's prowling ground, the ways which make a network parallel to Grant, and further up the steep slope which shoulders Stockton and Taylor. This network is a large piece of Chinatown, and is as remote from the remainder of San Francisco, and as alien, as the Asiatic homeland. It is the West's closest approximation of a Chinese village. It was here where Carver

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went to stalk Tai Ching, to spy him out. They were almost neighbors.

For Carver, belief and believing, and their opposites, had become meaningless concepts. Avoiding such Occidental snares, one simply went ahead and set to work. As would, for instance, the man who bakes Moon cakes, or makes *dim sum* for a tea house. A thing works, or it does not work. Thus, notions such as *superstition*, and *unscientific*, did not disturb him as he set out to tackle a Taoist magician, perhaps a full-dress adept. Having witnessed a few examples of minor magic, it would have been unscientific in the extreme to rationalize out of existence the blackouts and the mirror.

And here was the start—

Up four flights and thence to the roof.

Thence, fire escape and down to balcony.

Thence, to lower roof, a view of Tai Ching's apartment.

Carver had an assortment of keys and a bit of spring steel for outwitting an ordinary lock. This first reconnaissance was only to familiarize himself with the building and Tai Ching's habits.

Crouched in the shadow of the parapet, Carver could look across the narrow gap and into the corner apartment. Next prowl, when Tai Ching was away, he'd go up the stairs, drill holes through the panels of the hall door, plug them with putty, and come back later to observe the man.

Nothing happening. Relax and look at Coit Tower, reaching up from Telegraph Hill, up—up—up and into the moonlight. Psychiatrists no doubt asserted it was a phallic symbol. Eventually, Carver glimpsed motion: a man crossing the living room. He seated himself, whether in a club chair or a chesterfield, Carver couldn't tell, since only one arm was visible. The posture suggested that Kwan Tai Ching was not engaged with a visitor.

He wasn't reading. The head position wasn't right for that. He got up, abruptly, as though phone or doorbell had set him in motion, or a glance at his watch had prompted him. Nothing to see. But, presently, something to hear:

The drum was deep-voiced. The rhythm accorded with no pattern Carver had ever heard. Hearing it was disturbing. He found it difficult to keep his breathing normal. His mind warned him against letting it get in step with that diabolical drum. As ever more effort was needed to maintain control, he wavered between irritation and apprehension. At times it seemed that the cadence was being impressed upon his pulse. He concentrated on breathing, which was easier to control and which was linked to the pulse.

He closed his eyes, shifted his consciousness so as to "follow" his

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breath; he pictured a purely imaginary course, the final phase of exhalation being up and through his spinal cord. This required relaxation. Resolving, determining to control, were self-defeating.

Carver was not yet ready to bail out, but the time was near.

Then Kwan began to chant, which made things worse. The mantra was a blast of power. The drum proved to be only a carrier wave for the massive surge which the man set in motion. He could not understand a word, yet he *felt* the command to quit his body and come nearer.

Fighting to disobey, he had no power left for flight.

Dr. Tseng had showed good judgement in avoiding a contest.

Abruptly, drum and mantra ceased. Carver now felt that he was isolated, and in a vacuum. This was absurd, since he could hear cars grinding up the steep grade of Washington Street, the horn-blasts, the squeal of wheels spinning before they caught and took charge with a jerk. Such intrusions were music, a reprieve. All these sounds were attenuated as from a world he was quitting, had quit.

Silence become as abominable as the sound had been. His pulse and breathing were backing off toward the vanishing point. Bail-out time was here—make it, if you can—

Tai Ching moved back into view. His hair gleamed lacquer-black. Something—someone stirred beyond him. He did have a visitor. A woman.

Even before she momentarily faced toward Carver, he knew that this was Lan Yin. He might have been mistaken about features glimpsed through distorting glass, but not about the skirt with the Persian border design.

Her face was blank, immobile. A moment later, her smile blossomed as in sudden and happy recognition. Lan Yin extended her arms. She turned, making what might have been a dance-step, as she wafted out of Carver's view. Tai Ching moved out of sight.

Carver flipped a leg over the parapet. "How did *she* get here ahead of me? And why, Goddamn it, *why?*"

He was relieved to be out from under it all, and at the same time, desolation and loneliness depressed him. He began to realize the strength of the bond which still linked him and Lan Yin. Bitterly, he reminded himself that it was a one-way tie. Next move, get out, out, out!

Stretching long legs, he set out at a pace conspicuously out of keeping with the place. Mirror magic, making her conscious of the bond which linked her to Kwan, had nudged her toward the Taoist magician. At least, he could quit down-grading her, but he lead-

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footed his way to the temple, and into the shrine room. The final eighth of an inch of joss stick smouldered between two candles. She had lost little time.

Now that Lan Yin was gone, he'd resume his own cell. He wondered how long her perfume would haunt the room.

More than perfume awaited him.

A girl sat by the reading lamp. A paper-back, *The Nature of the I Ching,* lay on the floor. She was all asprawl, too much chair, not enough girl.

"So, Lan Yin sends a stand-in. Try this one, you won't miss me so much. No, it'd take Sally to pull that one!"

That was what Carver was thinking until he stopped short and quit all thought. He could not grapple with the fact that the girl was nobody but Lan Yin. And then came the question he could neither consider nor avoid: "Who—what—did I see at Kwan's place?"

Yanking the door shut, he made for the shrine room. He glanced about, chin jutting, and he scowled. Having someone with whom to argue would have been a blessing. Finally, he grabbed the mirror of Ko Hung, and headed for the rear. Once more, he held it to see whether he could get the reflection of her averted face.

As before, swirling mist took form, solidifying here, parting there: and then, a clear glimpse of Kwan Tai Ching. He was making ritual gestures. Near him was a vague figure, hidden as the clear space clouded, contracted, curtain-wise. Lan Yin's dismissal?

Carver went back to the shrine room to replace the mirror.

A latch click startled him. He stepped to the passageway. Lan Yin was coming out of her temporary bedroom, moving unsteadily. Her eyes didn't come into focus until she was within arm's length of Carver.

"I must've had another blackout." She glanced at the altar. On the red stem of the joss stick was only a flake of unburned incense, and scarcely a thread of smoke. "Now I remember, I lit it to bring you luck. You didn't lose much time getting back."

"You took even less," Carver retorted.

"Took less what?" She regarded him perplexedly.

"Time getting back from Tai Ching's place."

Turning, he put the mirror back in its crescent cradle.

"Getting back from Tai Ching's place," she echoed. "Oh, *that* crazy night! But I mean, tonight, now—"

"I mean tonight, just now. You were there at his place."

"Tao Fa, I don't get it, what's this about? I've not been away. Right after you left, I picked up your book about the *I Ching* and

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sat down. Before I read far, I blacked out."

She obviously believed every word of it.

"Do you know of anyone who looks a lot like you? And who wears a skirt like yours? Embroidery, wide embroidery at the hem, same kind of pattern."

"I'm a stock model. Might be a dozen women who'd resemble me from a distance, and by artificial lighting. This skirt—I copied the pattern from a book— What's going on? I'm all confused!"

Carver sighed. "So am I!" He told her of his spying, of the sinister drumming and chanting, and of the facsimile Lan Yin. "When I saw you, or your double, or whatever it was that I did see, well, I'd had it! Whatever possessed you to leave the temple and go over to see him—anyway, I hustled back. Knowing that you were at his place—after all we'd talked out, and decided we'd do—I was sure you'd not come back—so, I barged into my room, the one you'd not be using any more."

"I've not been out of the temple. It's all so simple. Let's go over and meet the girl. You've had a weird hour, and having me around the place—who wouldn't be twitchy!"

"If he has a doll over there, he'd not let us in."

"But I'll phone."

"That'll make him so happy, he'll tell you to come right over?"

"I'll tell him I'm coming over with a friend. That way, whoever his date is, he won't be embarrassed or annoyed. She showed up about the time you started peeping. We've not been yakking long. We'd not be interrupting anything that's gone beyond happy notions."

"Darling, you're talented! And here's our play—there's a public phone a short half block from his street entrance. I'll make for that while you're calling. No chance of her leaving and our not noticing her."

"You think of everything!"

"I do," he conceded. "Including most of the wrong things first."

IV.

Carver followed Lan Yin into Kwan Tai Ching's cluttered living room.

"Good evening, Mr. Carver. It was kind of Lan Yin to give me this pleasure." He swept aside a topcoat, several books, a week's accumulation of *China Daily Times*, to make room on the chesterfield.

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"Sit down, sit down." And to Lan Yin, "What a delightful surprise!"

However intense the dark eyes beneath heavy brows, however commanding the distinctly beaked nose and rugged, squarish face, Kwan was amiable, outreaching, a gracious person. Carver was unable to picture a red card, DANGER! MAGICIAN AT WORK. Even more difficult was it to see him in the role of treacherous friend. Nothing added up. He had to make his case against Kwan before the charm and magnetism of the man undermined his wits and his resolution. Carver glanced about the room.

Everything was dust-filmed except the musical instruments—*p'i p'a*, several drums, a moon fiddle. These gleamed.

A bedroom door yawned, exposing chaos—books, garments, bottles, furniture, all tied into a tight pattern by lanes of clear floor which interconnected the islands of accumulated odds and ends.

Through an archway, Carver saw a compact kitchen. His glance shifted back to the Taoist shrine, the tall urns, the life-size ceramic Kwan Yin, and the wall scrolls of the living room.

"No place to lay her," Carver thought, "except on the floor or that club chair . . . no place to hide her, except under the garbage . . . that's out . . . whoever she is, she'd spend an hour of housecleaning first."

The big table presented a flower arrangement, slide projector, an ink slab, half a dozen brushes, and many strips of paper.

"Calligraphy," Carver groped. "As well as music?"

"So many things, and life so short. One can only dabble."

Carver gestured to indicate one of the strips of paper. "**Soaring Dragon: Dancing Phoenix**," he read, and bent closer. "A single unbroken stroke, four characters!"

"Unusual!" Kwan applauded. "That this style of script is no problem for you."

Carver declined the compliment. "This is one of Dr. Tseng's favorite exercises. He must have taken lessons from you."

"On the contrary, he taught me."

A side glance, catching Lan Yin's eye, convinced Carver that she'd completed her inspection and had dismissed the woman, real or imaginary, as another of those phenomena which needn't be explained. No doubt Lan Yin had told Tai Ching that he and Carver had much in common: and whatever it was, they'd finally get to it, or, it would be skillfully buried or evaded. Meanwhile, without interrupting his comments on Professor Ho's concert tour of Latin America, Tai Ching stepped to the kitchen to heat water for tea.

Presently, he cleared table space for serving tea and setting out a tin box of *fung wong* rolls.

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Carver had taken all he could. Before he and this amiable character became buddies, he'd break through and play it foreign devil style. "Mr. Kwan, I'd enjoy getting back to this conversation some other time. Right now, you could help us—me and Lan Yin—we are trying to figure out how you and she have a common interest in a funeral that took place quite late in the Tang Dynasty."

Kwan smiled, nodded, as though he'd heard a question about parking spaces or Chinese New Year. "It's time to discuss things which have worried you and Lan Yin more than they should have. My friend, Sang Chung Li, has also been concerned." He addressed Lan Yin: "I didn't know how to start. But I'd sensed that you both were in a mood very much like my own."

"A funeral, or was it a wedding, Mr. Kwan?"

"Both. Please do not think I am being sticky when I tell you that this funeral came before the marriage."

"Unusual, even during the Tang Dynasy. Please tell us more?"

"Since you read Chinese and have an unusual appreciation of our customs, you needn't take anyone else's word for anything. The written words of the Ancestors prevent us from having unsociable qualms." He got up. "Please excuse me, while I find a writing."

Lan Yin leaned close and whispered, "Easy, wasn't it? We're not cryptic, poker faced, or subtle. No, there hasn't been a woman in the house for weeks and weeks."

"Wait till you see what he comes up with."

Within a minute, Tai Ching had outwitted chaos. He returned with documents and an accordian-pleated book. These things were dust-free. He untied the cord which secured the lot. From the bottom he took a scroll which was rolled on a rod half an inch in diameter. The ends of the rod were trimmed with knobs of agate. He offered Carver the roll of silk damask.

Carver shook his head. "This is historical. If it's not a sacred relic, it comes very close. Except that it's not the right color, I'd guess it to be an Imperial proclamation. You handle it."

Tai Ching unrolled a foot or more of damask with characters brushed in columns, edge to edge. He said, "Take your time, please. You mustn't hurry."

Finally, Carver said, "This certain branch of the Kwan family and that certain branch of the Liang Family conducted a wedding. The two principals were represented by proxies. This was because the bride-to-be and the groom-to-be had died within a few days of each other. This was several years before they were old enough to marry.

"The contract of betrothal had been signed while they were quite

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young." He was now addressing Lan Yin. "In this there was nothing of the American style, boy-meets-girl, falling in love business. It was very much like the European marriage, as in France and elsewhere. This was to join two families, financially and politically. Each was wealthy and important.

"Now I'll add words not written here: What with wars and pestilences there was no member of either family to marry in his own right, to bind the two groups. So, back to the written word: Mr. So-and-So and Miss Such-and-Such represented the deceased. This wedding came in the proper season of the year in which the Liang daughter and the Kwan son would have been old enough to marry, had they lived.

"I see now," he said to Kwan, "how it came that the boy and the girl went to their funerals before they were married."

Silence, until Tai Ching said, very softly, "Mr. Carver, you are correct as far as you have gone. But there is more."

"Please tell us. I've had it. So has she."

He choked, he blinked, he swallowed. Like Lan Yin, he was again experiencing wedding and funeral in lands beyond the Mirror. Her face twitched. Tears trickled down her cheeks. Tai Ching sighed, nodded.

"I know how you feel, Mr. Carver, but why you are moved so deeply is far from clear. Let me carry on, from the Kwan Family history.

"The Liang daughter and the Kwan son saw much of each other during their early years, before their association would have been considered improper. After they had attained such age, they managed to steal a few moments, a few words, whenever festivals brought their families together.

"In their young emotionality, these early-teens were in love and looking forward to their marriage. One died of the epidemic. The other died without bodily illness or sign of harm, some days later."

Carver pulled himself together and said, "Lan Yin and I got a glimpse of this through the Mirror of Master Ko Hung. Identity of surname means ever so much more with the Chinese than with the Occidental. But there are so many hundred millions of Chinese, and so few surnames in that language, this need not, can not, except by wildest coincidence, relate to Liang Lan Yin of here and now."

"Correction, if you please." Tai Ching bowed. "There is more to this than you realize, more than likeness of surnames." His eyes became intense, luminous; the man's magnetism compelled belief, enforced acceptance of what he said. "You do not understand at all."

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Lan Yin's color was receding. Her breathing became impossibly slow, scarcely perceptible.

"I, Kwan Tai Ching, was for a dozen or thirteen years that young Mr. Kwan of the betrothal contract. Liang Lan Yin for a dozen years was that Miss Liang Hua Lan, a thousand years ago.

"We are born again in new bodies, with brains that can not remember the names and forms of previous incarnations. Still, there are ways of recalling. With some, there is growth into spontaneous awareness. With others it comes from occult study and long practice. I spent a number of years at the Lion Mountain Monastery in Taiwan.

"So, when she and I at last met here, in San Francisco, I recognized Liang Lan Yin, once Liang Hua Lan. My recognition was in my ordinary consciousness. She sensed that we were linked, but this was not in her ordinary awareness—you may prefer *unconscious* or you may use that word every American bandies about glibly, *subconscious*."

He addressed Carver: "Now that you know that she and I belong to each other, you can help her see for herself, help her to look backward, look inward, let the soul wisdom of the Unconscious reach into her everyday awareness."

Lan Yin swayed. Before Tai Ching could steady her, she was clinging to Carver. He scooped her from her feet and stretched her on the chesterfield. Turning, he rasped, "Goddamn it, Mr. Kwan! I can buy your story—I really can—I saw enough—but I can't—" He gulped, regained control of himself and continued in a level voice, "I can't applaud your methods. Forgive my rudeness. I am sorry. I offer my sincere apologies."

"A thousand years is a long, long time," Tai Ching said, sadly, and with tone and bearing which Carver recognized as acceptance and also as rebuttal of his accusation. "A nip of brandy, and she'll be all right." Then, as he returned with a bottle and a porcelain soup spoon, "Better take her back to the temple. Help her look deeper into the mirror."

"You might help by knocking off those blackouts! I leave it to you. I ask you to think it over."

Kwan Tai Ching bowed. "The blackouts brought her to you. So far, you have done much good. Please continue."

And then he poured, without spilling a drop, until the soup spoon was brim full.

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V.

After an hour or more of sitting with Lan Yin and Chung Li in the study room of the temple, Carver said, "I don't blame you for wanting to talk this thing out, but the fact is, we get nowhere. There is every reason to believe that the documents are genuine family records. We're all inclined to accept reincarnation as being as plausible as any other doctrine on life and death and survival or return. Whether Kwan Tai Ching is actually a later model of the young man who was going to marry Liang Hua Lan a thousand years ago is interesting but totally irrelevant! The only thing that concerns us is to figure out what we can do to liberate Lan Yin. Let's get at that, and be damned to speculation and reasoning!"

Chung Li and Lan Yin exchanged glances. She said, "My want-to's haven't changed a bit. Tao Fa saw the wedding and the funeral, just as Tai Ching told us about them. No doubt that he's been gaining control of me—he's as good as admitted it."

"Here we go again!" Carver interrupted. "Lan Yin, how far will you go, if you have to—call it having your want-to's, or self defense, or—"

She said, finally, "You didn't speak the words, but you were thinking them—*would you make a date, kill him, claim it was to prevent rape?*"

Carver nodded. "I was wondering just about that. But I didn't ask you. Well, what would you do?"

She crumpled in the face of the challenge. "I'm afraid—I can't dishonor the Ancestors—I can't make them default." She turned on Chung Li: "And you'd be upset if I did!"

Carver interposed. "Chung Li, speak for yourself!"

The keen-faced young man had become even more depressed. Carver's demand made him flinch, made him sag, shake his head wearily. "It would be bad joss. How could I fight my sworn brother, and ask my wife to go against her soul-memories. I'd be bad for her, she'd be bad for me."

Carver grimaced amiably. "Be hell to give each other up, and bad joss if you don't. Right?" He waggled his hand. "Never mind answering! Your faces have spoken for you. The three of us are human, and so is Kwan Tai Ching. Now listen!"

The command brought them to their feet.

"The *I Ching* is a book. It is also a person. It is ancient wisdom—but it is not human. Let's consult it."

Once in the shrine room, Carver set a lacquered table in front of

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the offerings-table which fronted the altar. From a cabinet he took a book and a long, narrow box. These were wrapped in embroidered red silk. He spread the wrapping as a table cover. He fired joss sticks, putting three to the right, three to the left, and three at the middle of the further edge of the table.

Standing by a plastic waste basket, he beckoned to Lan Yin, and extended his hands. From the stand near the altar, she took a vase and splashed a few drops on his hands, the ceremonial washing. He then took the vase and dribbled water on the upturned palms of Lan Yin and Chung Li. This done, Carver took the tumbler and a sprig of the foliage which sat on the offerings-table. He circled the smaller table three times. At each step, he dipped the leaves into the tumbler and flicked a few drops of "magnetized" water to his right, and to his left.

"Uncle Tao Fa, does that really chase devils away?"

"This isn't devil chasing. Like the joss sticks, the sprinkling of magnetized water is symbolic. Kowtowing in front of the Book is not worshipping it. All this is to get an inquirer into a serious mood, in tune with the *I Ching*. One approaches it as one would the Ancestors. Now, line up in front of the table."

He tinkled the little hand-bell. All three knelt, touched foreheads to the floor. The next sounding of the bell was the signal to rise. At the completion of the third kowtow, Carver said, "Let's be all-out modern. Instead of the long routine of manipulating the yarrow stalks in the box, we'll toss coins instead. *Understanding* the substance of the *I Ching,* its purpose, that's really the most important—so, try to soak up what I'm telling you.

"The sixty-four hexagrams represent every basic, every fundamental condition. The Judgements set forth the right way to respond to conditions. The *Book of Change*—the *I Ching*—gives the essence of a situation. It tells you how to act with regard to that which is, instead of in accord with what was once said about what in fact was actually different, although on the face of it, they seemed the same.

"You can shape your fate if you know *that which is*. But first of all, you have to state a question. When you first came to the temple, your question was *not* whether to marry or to part. The question was, how can Lan Yin get liberation?

"Now, Lan Yin, speak for yourself. Don't feel awkward about speaking to a book. Don't let that bug you."

She frowned. "Just ask what I should do to be free? The way I asked you, only not in so many words?"

"You might ask what you, and I, and Chung Li—we're working

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together—should do."

"All along, that's been my real thought."

"Speak it to the Book, aloud."

She bowed, took a short step toward the table. Lan Yin regarded the altar and the Book. She licked her lips and shook her head as though to clear it.

"Venerable Book! How can I and Uncle Tao Fa and Chung Li get me free from Tai Ching's power?"

Carver took three antique Chinese coins from the box. Each had an inscribed face and a blank face. He handed them to Lan Yin.

"Toss them. Flip them so they hit the box and spin."

She did so. When the coins came to rest, Carver said, "Each blank face counts as three. Each inscribed face is two. Your throw shows two twos and a three, which is seven—a solid line, *yang*, and not changing. This is the first line of the hexagram."

Lan Yin did not move.

He finally prompted, "Next throw."

She said, "Let's each take a turn. My question was what we all together should do."

"Chung Li, you toss them," Carver said.

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When the coins came to rest, he read, "A two and two threes, which is eight, a broken line, *yin*, and not changing."

Above the solid line, he pencilled a broken line. He picked up the coins, tossed them, and recorded the result. Thus, turn after turn, they built the hexagram, the pattern of six lines.

Carver opened the *I Ching* to the hexagram entitled *Shih Ho*, and said, "That means *biting through*. The upper three lines are called *li*, which is fire. The lower trigram is called *chen*, thunder, the arousing.

"*Biting through*—our move is to do something. To prevent serious damage, we should act. Deliberate opposition of the kind we've had does not quit of its own accord. However, we must act in the right way. Though thunder symbolizes violence, this need not mean physical force. It can be mental or emotional. And we must not be too rugged. *Li*, fire, is yielding—but going too far in being gentle would be a disaster. *Shih Ho*, if you want to be literal about it, means *union by gnawing*, biting through what causes separateness."

When Carver paused, Lan Yin and Chung Li regarded him: their bewilderment was plain.

"But what're we supposed to *do*?" she demanded.

"The Book tells the nature of the situation—not the details of what to do. We've been tackling dummies for Tai Ching's magic. Now is the time to bite through, all the way through, till the teeth meet."

"But can't you tell us *something* definite?" Lan Yin asked.

"I could, but I won't. I've got a lot of cogitating to do. You, each of you, do the same. I'm through talking. What you two do is your business. But if you're going to talk, don't do it here."

"Uncle Tao Fa, you can't throw me out. I'll kick and scream!"

"You damn well would, if you knew what I am more than half thinking of doing."

"You'll keep her locked up?" Chung Li asked. And then, "It's late, and I'm a wage slave."

"I could padlock the hall door," Carver answered, "but there's a fire escape, and what'd the fire chief say if I nailed up an exit?"

VI.

Most amiably, they had progressed from "Mr. Carver" and "Mr. Kwan" to "Uncle Tao Fa" and "Tai Ching." The latter was repeating, quietly firm rather than contentious, "Lan Yin and I are bound in

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a way that is beyond your appreciation. Your understanding is purely intellectual. For us to fail to honor a contract made by our Ancestors would leave us bent double under a load of guilt."

Carver nodded. "You and Chung Li are sworn brothers, a relationship we of the West once had but have forgotten. And we're the loser. We needn't set up the small altar of earth, nor blend the blood of a fowl and a dog. We'd not even have to recite,

"If I were carrying a peddler's parasol
And met you, riding a horse,
You would dismount and bow to me.
If you tramped along in a clodhopper coat of straw
And I rode in a palanquin carried by porters
I'd get down and bow to you.

"But we of the West would be better off if friends spoke something of the sort, instead of wallowing in boy-meets-girl T.V. romance, or poetry equally romantic and empty." He shrugged, made a careless gesture. "But I'm over-rating you, Tai Ching. You rob your sworn brother of his girl."

Kwan retorted, fiercely, "I'm not free! Lan Yin isn't free. I hate to hurt my friend but I'm driven! When I met her, I didn't know she belonged to Chung Li. The ancient bond took command. There was recognition from deep in the background consciousness! Can you believe that this didn't begin as a willful wrong?"

"I know that that's true. And when she tumbled into bed with you—"

Tai Ching almost spoke, but checked himself.

Carver resumed, "No person told me. You were quite right in not asking who spoke to me. A slip is a slip! But when she would not come back, you overpowered her with Taoist mantras, with the science of sound and vibration. That wasn't honest seduction! The Ancestors drew fair contracts. You dishonor them!

"Yes, I spied on you. I saw her shadow in your apartment—her image—and I knew that what I saw could not be any human form." He described Lan Yin's unique dress. "When she blacks out, the mirror of Ko Hung doesn't reflect her face. The real self is absent. That self has quit the body and has gone to answer your command. You're doing her emotional and mental harm."

He fixed Tai Ching with a fierce unwavering eye. This accusation had shaken him; it was the "thunder." Would the ultimate blast be necessary?

Tai Ching finally said, "I've done no permanent damage." He smiled sombrely. "Your mirror work—when we three sat here, I

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knew from her presence that for the first time, she had truly felt and lived again those long-ago days."

Carver grimaced. "So, you and I are accomplices! I'm here to help you get yourself clear. Let her go before harm is permanent. Did your Honorable Ancestors contract for you to damage Lan Yin?"

"But I'd not be doing that, once we marry."

"That contract a thousand years ago referred only to the bodies of Mr. Kwan and Miss Liang. The immortal, that which reincarnates, cannot be bound over the centuries. The bond died with those young bodies."

That stopped Tai Ching, but the stubborn fixity of his face made it plain that inwardly, he hadn't budged. Carver shrugged, smiled ruefully, and said, "Then it's a deadlock, isn't it? You're the immovable object, and nobody seems to have the irresistible force to shake you!

"But—do you know—we can break the deadlock. After all, it's a sad business. Lan Yin is in a miserable predicament, she's in a disastrous bind. Through no fault of her own, she's causing a break between sworn brothers. Whichever of you she accepts, she's making one of you wrong the other. I hate to think of it. So do you. So does he.

"Still, there is a way out of it all. One that neither of you has thought of—the certain way of protecting fraternity."

Eagerness—curiosity—brightened Tai Ching's face, and he relaxed, all renewed and hopeful. "Please share your wisdom."

"I will marry Lan Yin. End of problem."

During a thin slice of time, Kwan stood there as though numbed by words he could neither regard as a threat nor dismiss as absurd. During Kwan's inability to do or to say, Carver made for the street.

"That was *chen*—thunder, shock . . ." he said to himself, and then realized that the recoil had left him as punchy as Kwan. From the doorway he saw the booth from which Lan Yin had phoned to arrange his first meeting with Kwan. Light-headed, he pounced for it, and dialled Sang Chung Li's office.

"Tao Fa speaking. Come to the temple soon as you can. I've just seen Kwan. He heard the thunder."

When Carver stepped into the shrine room, he found Lan Yin at the altar, lighting joss sticks. She started, eyed him, read his face. "What's happened?"

"Just phoned Chung Li. He'll be coming up."

"What've you been doing?"

"Gave Tai Ching his first shock treatment. As we planned. If I

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have to be away, Chung Li will be here to be sure that nothing disturbs you."

She caught him by the shoulders. Her nails dug in. "What've you been *doing*?"

For a long moment, they looked at each other, eye to eye. "How far will you go with me—I've put everything on the line!"

"*We'll bite till the teeth meet!*" Her lips thinned, her teeth gleamed white. "Remember?" Tiptoeing, she caught him with both arms, drew herself closer. "Tao Fa—we went together through the Mirror."

Then they were mouth to mouth, and Carver learned about Chinese kissing. "Whatever it is—no matter how dangerous—anything to be free!" She sank back to her heels, caught her breath, and whispered, "Tell me—"

"You're going to marry me. He can't hex me, and so he'd lose a lot of his power over you. I can't promise—"

"Don't promise—let's try it—"

She slipped from his arms. And as he followed her to the nearest of the upholstered benches along the wall, he said, "You had to talk me out of the surprise I was saving for you and Chung Li!"

"Don't worry. When I hear it a second time, I'll look blinking-eyed amazed, and how'll he be looking?"

Sitting there, awaiting Chung Li's arrival, gave Carver time to become aware of what he had stirred up. He flicked a side-glance at Lan Yin. Though her eyes had a far-away expression, and her lips were slightly parted in the lurking shadow of a smile, she was entirely present and accounted for.

Finally he nudged her. She blinked. "You look as though you've married one Foreign Devil every other Friday for months."

"I was wondering how to look surprised, and how Chung Li's going to look. How'd Kwan take it?"

"I left before he could speak. He was on his feet, but out."

A long silence, and then she interrupted his clock-watching: "It'll be a lot easier for you now. Won't have to watch me." She patted his hand. "You'll live through it."

Finally, the door bell jangled. It jangled again.

"That's Chung Li."

"It'd better be," And Carver went to the door.

It was Chung Li. He blinked, glanced about. "What happened?"

"I had a talk with Kwan. One of us is going to be totalled, and I'm damned if I can guess who it's going to be. Get this much: Lan Yin is not leaving this place. If there's fire or earthquake, go with her, don't let her out of your reach. And another thing—don't phone

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anyone—don't answer the phone—I want Kwan Tai Ching kept guessing—he mustn't have a word with either of you, he must not, repeat, not know a *thing* about either of you. And while you're digesting that much, I'm making one call, just one."

Carver dialled his adopted niece. "Uncle Tao Fa again."

"*Again?* Yes, after ages! Still have that girl on the brain?"

"Will you cancel all your dinner dates for tonight, sleeping-with engagements, everything, and go to the Pot Sticker until I can meet you for talk and a bite to eat."

"How many suicides do you want to touch off for the weekend? I always have five, six dates lined up for Friday nights."

"All *right.* We'll compromise. I'll allow you one other nasty old man. Do you know Sam Chan?"

"You mean the Number One man at Canton Building & Loan?"

"You're thinking of Joe Chan. I mean Dr. Fung's friend. Sam runs a grocery store on Commercial Street—"

"Oh, you mean the one where you get dried ducks for six dollars?"

"Right. Anyway, he's a notary public, and when he's not drinking *ng ka pay*, he's translating the Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch. If you can't talk him into it, get someone else. A scholar, and have him bring his *chop* and a notary seal, his own or any he can borrow."

"You begin to sound illegal—notary seal—someone else's—"

"This is confidential, and I am in a bind."

"If you really want an abortionist, why don't you say so?" And then, "All *right!* Be stubborn. If not Sam Chan, a reasonable facsimile—I'll be charming, I'll bust myself. The suspense is *terr*ific!"

"If I keep you waiting too long, go ahead and eat. And from now on, I'll not be on the phone. So don't call back."

Chung Li and Lan Yin were in a whisper-huddle. Carver broke up the *tête-à-tête*: "I'll dash over to the Dragon Barbecue to get us a roast duck. You get busy steaming the rice."

"Don't forget the plum sauce," Lan Yin reminded him as he left.

From the Dragon, Carver headed slantwise across Waverly Place and into the Pot Sticker. He said to the Number One Man, "When Sally Wong comes in, alone or with a friend—" He handed him a trio of tens. "—take her order and tell her if I'm going to be awfully late, I'll phone."

That attended to, he got a bottle of *shao hsing* and retraced his course.

In addition to having rice in the electric cooker, Lan Yin had a pot of boiling water into which she put the bottle of wine. Before it was hot enough to serve, she filled three little jade cups.

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"First round, to Tao Fa. Before we get to the awfully serious."

Chung Li raised his cup. "Whatever you've done, I drink to it."

Lan Yin said, "Let's eat later."

"Smart girl," Carver agreed, and followed her to the shrine.

Lan Yin refilled the cups. On the offerings-table she set a cup of wine, a tiny bowl of rice, and a slice of duck. All three faced the altar, and bowed three times.

Then Carver drew a deep breath, and nerved himself for the test.

"Sit down. I'll tell you about a busy hour with Kwan Tai Ching. Lan Yin, remember, we were saying, you were saying that whether you carried on with Chung Li, or turned to Kwan, it'd be a disaster?"

The lovers eyed each other, but said nothing.

"I told Kwan Tai Ching there was a way out of the deadlock."

Chung Li sat there, face immobile.

Finally Lan Yin asked, "How can that be?"

"Marry me, and there's no problem."

Chung Li's face was bland, blank. Carver wondered whether she had briefed him. He continued, "Lan Yin, call Kwan Tai Ching and tell him that we would not consider it rude if he did not attend our wedding. And say—this is important—that you have not yet made up your mind as to the lucky day. But, it'll be soon."

"Do you understand Mandarin?"

"Only Cantonese."

Going to the phone, she spoke briefly. After a pause which was not as long as Carver had expected, she spoke again, very slowly. Whatever she said, it seemed to be a repetition of what she'd first told Kwan. Then, new words, softly spoken; a pause, and a phrase of leave-taking.

Lan Yin turned to Carver: "It would be more polite if you did not have further words with Kwan Tai Ching."

"Thank you." He regarded his wife-to-be, and tried to understand her serenity. "He'll be speaking to me, and I'll have to answer. Now I'll meet my niece, and have a talk with the old scholar, Sam Chan. The contract has to be just right, with no loopholes."

"Whether we marry by Chinese custom or American, you have my promise." Then, deliberately, "If I'm not truly liberated, I'll need your help more than ever."

Sang Chung Li had been pacing about the shrine room. Irresolute, he turned toward the door, stopped short, then advanced anew.

"There's more to this than you realize, Chung Li. Now that he knows, never let her out of sight or beyond your reach."

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VII.

One sweeping glance, and Carver saw Sally Wong and her companion at a corner table of the Pot Sticker's crowded dining room. Pint-size Sally waved: "Uncle Tao Fa!"

To tourists and other standard Americans, she was just another moderately good looking Chinese girl in her middle-twenties, distinguished mainly by an impish quirk of features, and an eye glint to match. To natives of the Chinese city, there was something less obvious about the eyes, about her facial structure, and then, her wavy hair: altogether, one glance, and the judgement was, "Hawaiian blood—"

Her companion, whether nasty or not, was at least ninety, though he didn't look a day past seventy. His third family was in its early thirties—Sam Chan, scholar, dedicated drinker, notary public, and during his spare time, enough of a groceryman to make a living.

"Uncle Tao Fa, are you really marrying the girl?"

"Yes."

"And you couldn't tell me till the last minute?"

"I phoned you, first thing I knew about it all."

From his three-family experiences, Sam Chan could well wag his bald head and say, patronizingly, "Better late than never."

Carver said to the waiter who glided to the table, "We'll have hot-sour soup—pot stickers—a tea-smoked duck—and a rock cod, deep fried—mmm, yes, brown spicy sauce. And a bottle of *shao hsing*."

"Tell us all about it!" Sally demanded.

"She's a bit younger than you, and almost as beautiful."

"Bet she's beautifuller. What's the story?"

"Girl watcher gets hooked! These dangerous Oriental women!" Then, "Dr. Chan—"

"Doctor, no. Literate, moderately so."

"So I'd judge from what I hear of your translations. And your calligraphy is famous."

"And I've heard of you—"

"Couldn't avoid it, not with Sally telling you—"

"For a fact, it wasn't Sally—Foreign Devil apprentice *tao shih* is famous no matter how he stays hid out. Otherwise, I'd not be here. I'm just pretending I am not curious about all this—"

"What I need," Carver began, "is a Chinese marriage contract. Old Custom. The words—very formal, Tang Dynasty, if you can."

"I brought brushes and stuff." He hefted a briefcase. "Sally told me you could do the writing yourself."

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"Maybe, but there'd not be so many questions if you did it. There are some odd things about it all. Such as, this is strictly confidential. News about this could be dangerous. To others."

"Not to you?"

Carver shrugged. "If it got to me, I'd take care of it. But my wife-to-be is in a peculiar situation."

The waiter served the soup. Carver tasted, added three drops of peppery oil to his bowl, and two dashes of rice vinegar.

"Uncle Tao Fa! How do you stay so deliberate?"

"Suspense buildup is part of this project."

"For you?" Sam Chan cocked an eyelid. "For the bride? Anyway, a fresh attitude."

"We have an enemy. If he's impatient enough, marriage chances will be better."

A tea-smoked duck with dumplings arrived, followed by a rock cod well over a foot long. Chop stick drill took nearly two hours.

"You're a sadist, keeping her waiting this way!"

"She has good company."

"Mother?" Sam Chan asked. "Older sister?"

"Neither. The man she wanted to marry deserves a little time to get used to her change of plans. I told you this wedding shouldn't make any Chinatown paper."

"It ought to make all six of them!"

With choice leftovers of fish, including the rock cod's head, in one carton, and the surplus smoked duck in another, Carver led the way to the temple.

Serene as though she married a Foreign Devil every other Friday, Lan Yin welcomed the visitors, and poured hot wine.

In the study room, Sam Chan opened his brief case, from which he took an ink slab, a stick of ink, and five *chops*, massive ones, each cut from a stalk of special stone an inch and a half square. There was one stamp for each of his names. He selected a brush. After putting water into the hollow of the slab, he set to work grinding ink.

Then Carver remembered. "Did the phone ring?"

Lan Yin answered, "Long, long rings, twice in the past hour."

Carver's glance shifted to Chung Li. "I think it's working."

Sally said, "Whoever it is, you've got him hooked."

Lan Yin leaned close and whispered to Carver, "No blackout so far. We're winning!"

"Not so fast, *tai-tai!* When he calms down enough to concentrate, we'll run into trouble."

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Finally the viscosity of the ink was to Sam Chan's taste. The trial strokes on scrap paper ranged from hair lines to triangular patches, formal ideograms as precise as though done with instruments.

"The Tang Dynasty style," he announced, "What do I write?"

Carver answered, "Liang Lan Yin appoints my niece, Wong Mei Ling, to be her proxy and act in her stead in this matter."

Sally—Wong Mei Ling—went saucer-eyed.

Carver continued, "Just so, Mr. Chan—if Liang Lan Yin happens to be a long way from me, she and I can marry if Wong Mei Ling takes her place at the ceremony." Sally licked her lips and made as if to speak. Carver patted her hand. "No problem, doll. Once the ceremony's over, there's nothing else the proxy has to do to make it legal."

"Oh." Sally shrugged. "Life's one letdown after another!"

Carver addressed the scribe: "And then the contract—Simon Carver, also known as Tao Fa, and Liang Lan Yin, also known as Adeline Marie Liang, each agrees to marry the other. Shovel on the stately phrases, Tang Dynasty style. And now we're getting out of your hair—give us a shout when the brush work's done."

Chan stroked his head. "*Former* hairs! But before leaving me undisturbed, please leave a small jar of *shao hsing*."

The phone rang and rang and rang. . . .

"Chung Li, where's your car parked?"

"Contract stall, Portsmouth Square."

Carver answered the unvoiced query: "Kwan knows where you keep it. Better move it. Better for Lan Yin if he believes you are out of town."

Presently, Mr. Chan announced that the paper work was done.

Lan Yin signed the proxy in Chinese and in English. After affixing *chop* and notarial seal, Mr. Chan said, "The contract is ready."

As Lan Yin stepped up to the table, Carver said, "One thing should be clear. Signing this doesn't marry me and her?"

"No. It's an agreement to marry. Once she signs, she is stuck with the deal. If she marries someone else, you can sue her. If you marry someone else—"

"I'd be crazy!"

"—But she's not your wife, not until—"

"I know the business—bowing to the Immortals, to Heaven and Earth and to each other. She pours a cup of wine and each takes half."

"And," Mr. Chan added, "she shears her bangs to show she's a matron."

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"Where do I come in?" Sally demanded. "As proxy, do I have to have bangs to be cut off?"

Chan interposed, gestured, and the contracting parties signed.

"Now you're stuck with it. Neither can marry someone else, not unless the other okays it." As he sealed and *chopped*, he added, "No, you don't owe me anything, but you may send me a present."

Carver beckoned to Sally: "I don't want my line to give a busy signal. Call from the booth down the block for a cab to get you and Mr. Chan home."

When Sally and the scribe left, Carver said, "Chung Li, let me take your keys and move your car to St. Mary's garage." He took a folded paper from his coat pocket, and handed it to Lan Yin. "Whatever happens, don't get further than arm's length apart."

VIII.

Carver and Kwan Tai Ching faced each other in the temple study room. Between them was a table, and on it, Sam Chan's calligraphy, now mounted on a strip of silk damask. The encounter had not been as strained as either had anticipated. The worst was over—

But it's not started, not yet, Carver was thinking, as he said, "I wonder if I look as tired as you do."

"This hasn't been easy," Kwan admitted.

"Tai Ching, this isn't a declaration of war, and it's not a peace treaty, either. We're picking it up where we left off, for a better understanding. For each other, and for *them.*"

Kwan exhaled a long breath. "You make this no easier, Uncle Tao Fa."

Carver turned the scroll about. Kwan said, "I know. Yes. There she signed. There's the notary's seal. I'm here to beg you not to marry her."

"Same spirit I had when you and I talked to the breaking point? Let's not start over. Carry on, Tai Ching."

"She signed that contract to escape—her only way out—exactly what you told me. Three days, and I couldn't think past that. I wore the phone out, couldn't get you."

Carver sighed. "I had a lot on my mind."

"I'm begging you not to hold her to that contract. I've been afraid—hour after hour—it would be too late—"

"She and I could have gone to Reno. No waiting time, no three-day delay. But we didn't do that."

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"That's why I'm here! I'd not have waited three minutes. Neither would Chung Li! That you have waited—it left me one small hope—that you'd hear me out—"

Carver was neither a fisherman nor a bull-fighter: but he'd seen a large trout worn to a finish, fighting a hair-thin line on a three-and-a-half-ounce rod. And the bull had to wear himself out before any man could kill him.

"I mean no offense—she's marrying you to get out of an impossible position—she's using you as a means to an end—"

"No offense, Tai Ching. I know she's not turning from Chung Li because she wants to. But I've got to tell you something—remember, I spied on you, I saw her in your apartment—where she could not possibly have been, not at that time! What I saw was her shadow, her astral form, whatever it is that can leave the body when the body is asleep, or in a trance—*I saw that*—I told you—and you and I took that for granted, a matter of course.

"Now—how could I see the invisible?"

Tai Ching caught his breath, jerked back.

Carver followed through: "You were so wrapped up in your own power that you didn't realize that I had—well—extra sensory perception—haggle words all you want! But—I saw what you saw and what most people could not see."

"That—*that* never occurred to me."

"You've heard only the start of it. Now I'll give you the rest!" He leaned forward, fierce-eyed. "She and I went into time and space together, through the Mirror of Ko Hung—we saw the funeral that came before the wedding—whatever happened to her and me, Lan Yin and I were closer than ever we could have been if we'd gone to Reno, or to Carson City for a quickie ceremony in the Silver Queen and then three days in bed! We'd still be strangers who had to get used to each other—

"But diving through time and space together—breaking away from her isn't as easy as you imagine!" Then, very slowly, very softly, "Do you begin to realize what you are asking me to do?"

Kwan had no answer.

"It's not what I want to or do not want to," Carver continued. "I'm looking at what can and what can not be done. Separating her and me is pretty much like cutting Siamese twins apart, except that here, it is psychic surgery."

Carver grabbed the contract by its jade-knobbed roller rod. "The contract you showed us pretended to bind two teenagers after they had died. This one binds me to a living woman, speaking for herself,

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and before witnesses. As long as she lives with me, you can not dominate her. I'm a barbarian—I don't have your five thousand years of tradition—I'm not sensitive in the way of so many Asiatics. You dominated Lan Yin because Chung Li was dominated along with her. Your power would fall apart if you tried the same trick against me and her."

"If you knew that I had let go, totally let go, would you release her?"

"I'm awfully fond of Lan Yin. So much so that if I knew you'd quit baiting her out of her body, quit lousing up her life, I'd kiss her goodbye and wish her luck, and mean it!"

Kwan came to his feet, and of a sudden, he was majestic, powerful. "I'll burn those thousand-year-old writings—"

"No, take the writings, give them to her. She'll know then that you won't ever want to take command again. Give her the writings, so she can burn or keep them."

"Where is she?"

"I'll drive you to her door." Carver deftly rolled the damask scroll on its jade-tipped rod and thrust it into his coat pocket. "I'll hand her this contract. A release from you, a release from me."

For a long moment they regarded each other. Kwan said, "Neither has lost, neither has won, neither is beaten."

Carver bowed deeply. "You lose more than I know. And I lose more than you know."

Kwan thrust out his hand. Carver accepted it.

"Lan Yin," Carver told him, "is in a lodge near the mouth of the Russian River, where it comes out of the pine trees and meets the sea. She is with your sworn brother, Chung Li."

Kwan gulped twice, swallowed air each time.

Carver showed him the proxy. "Right now, if Wong Mei Ling came to the temple, and we bowed to the Immortals, to the four directions, and all the rest, and she and I shared a cup of wine, Chung Li would have no wife. Not by Chinese reckoning."

Kwan, Taoist magician, needed more than a moment to digest that one. Carver allowed him no time. "I gave your brother a proxy, and I *chopped* it. If he's in bed with my fiancée, he's acting for me."

Kwan's blinking slowly expanded into a harvest moon glow. "That is Chinese thinking. We are brothers in grief and in loss. Surely you love that girl. Let's drive—it's not too late—"

They set out; and they stopped at Kwan's apartment to pick up the family documents—and a bottle of *shao hsing*.

When Carver and Tai Ching had the Golden Gate Bridge behind

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them, they followed the road which snaked along, high above the ocean. Swirling mist veiled sun-reddened cliffs until, presently, it blotted out the sunset. By the time they cleared Bodega Bay, the drizzle became a rain which kept the wipers busy. Storm driven spray flooded the road. Finally, after a dozen miles of battling wind, Carver crossed the mouth of the river, to drive upstream.

"We're not looking for a village," he said. "Just a scattering of lodges and cabins. A place that belongs to one of Chung Li's friends. She phoned me—told me all about it—electricity for lights, bottled gas for the kitchen, fallen timber for the fireplace."

"Perfect, perfect! Dramatic weather. River rising—foam about rocks in channel—this light, almost failed—tremendous—"

"Be a damn sight more tremendous by daylight," Carver grumbled. "For me it's just another bitchy drive and getting worse every mile. If you Oriental nature-lovers spent more time behind the wheel, you'd get the facts of life!"

The car wove and sloshed about. Sheeting rain kicked headlight glare back into his eyes. They were well away from the river before Carver realized that this was a major change of direction, not a minor quirk of the road.

"Overshot our mark. See any lights, back there?"

"Yes, one, two, near river. One among trees, other side of road, up the slope."

"Good! Let's watch for a turn-around. If we get on the road shoulder, we're buggered through our oilskins."

"Colorful idiom," Tai Ching remarked. "No oilskins, no coats."

None like the Chinese to see a bright spot! Kwan seemed unable to realize that things were getting sticky. He recited in Chinese, and at times rendered the words into English. Carver got many a bit as he cursed, twitched the wheel, waggled and wangled and battled.

"A wind brings willow-cotton, sweetens the shop,
A girl from Wu pours wine, urging me to share it
With comrades come to see me off . . ."

Carver couldn't, he didn't want to ignore the mood which their meeting had evoked. He cut in. ". . . *Go ask the river if it can travel further than a friend's love*—"

"Ah—you do know it!" Tai Ching exclaimed, happily. "Li Po—"

"Only minutes to go, and you and Chung Li will be together again, same old friends—"

"Yes, also no. *Parting at a Wine Shop in Nan-King*—I thought of Li Po—I have a fine prospect in Taiwan. I was persuading Lan Yin

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to go with me—now, I go at once, and alone."

Now Li Po's lines had more meaning than ever. Carver, moved by the sadness behind it all, repeated a fragment, ". . . . *I say to him in parting*—Goddamn it! Now I've gone and done it!"

He'd made the U-turn in a spot as treacherous as it looked: off the hard surface, one wheel spun, churning mud. The other remained motionless.

Tai Ching took charge. "Uncle Tao Fa, for two, three days or more, you've worried about us. Stay here, I'll find the lodge."

Carver slid from the wheel so that his passenger could get out without wading in the ditch. "Chung Li can snake us out."

He shouted to offset the rumble of the river. Moonlight slashed through rifts in black clouds, and picked the foam where water swirled against pier or outcropping rock. A fallen tree snagged, broke loose, to resume its drifting. Dead timber floating from upstream flats raced along.

"Here, take the flashlight. There's a marker. It says WAN FU, in English and Chinese. Oh, yes, white Chrysler in driveway."

Tai Ching went jogging down the road.

Carver cut the engine and slid into the back seat. Storm was moving inland. Mission accomplished. Relax and rest.

Tai Ching's return startled Carver. He'd been sound asleep.

"I found Wan Fu and white Chrysler, but . . . no lights. No voices. Possibly recuperating from honeymoon doings. While you rest, let me watch. I can see when lights go on."

"Right . . . I'm good and tired . . . let 'em . . ." His words tumbled on their faces and into unspoken thought. ". . . have their fun and games . . . bound to take time out . . . for tea . . . or breath . . ."

Storm going inland . . . moonlight on the heels of darkness . . . no problem . . . until the latch click awakened him, Carver had been deep in the limbo between sleep and waking.

Tai Ching was at the river side of the road. Above the rumble of the flood there was a grinding, splintering sound. Tai Ching exclaimed. Carver sat up. He put a foot on the paving, and jerked back. Forgot he'd taken off his shoes.

Tai Ching was running. He yelled something in Chinese.

"What the hell . . . no lights on . . ."

Then Carver got the message. Something downstream had Tai Ching on the verge of panic. Carver got into his shoes. He fumbled with the laces, abandoned the attempt, and set out.

Tripping over his shoes cost him time. He tied the laces and resumed the chase.

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Still no lights. Moonlight was mirrored by the wet roof. Quitting the pavement, Tai Ching was dashing directly to the lodge. He splashed water with every bound. He fell headlong. Getting up, he yelled to split his throat. He stooped, clawed earth and threw something. A rock crashed against the lodge.

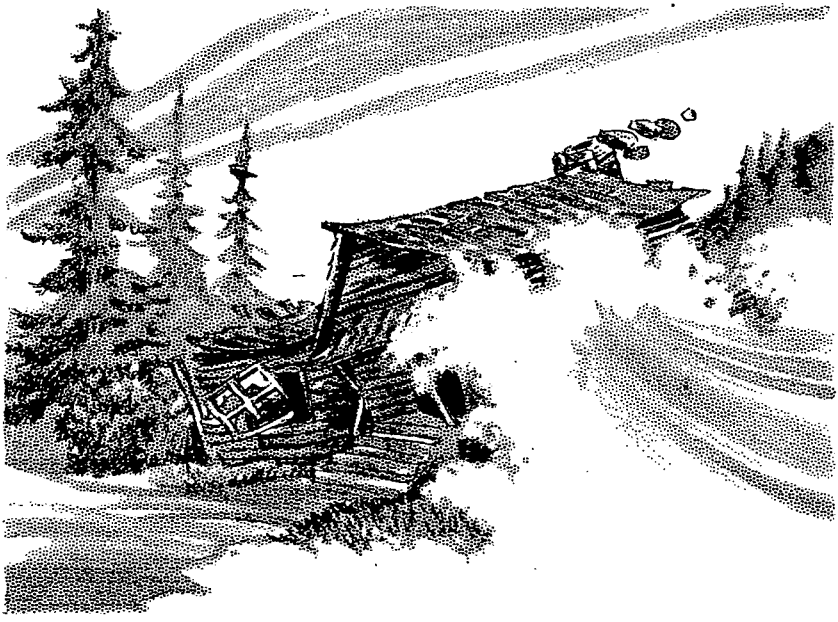
Carver, catching up, began to understand what Tai Ching had sensed from the beginning. A floating tree nestled against the piers which supported two thirds of the house. Smaller driftwood was accumulating. Foam outlined the growing stretch of debris. That the storm had moved inland had reassured him—but the narrowing of the valley, upstream, was concentrating the rainfall. Glancing back, he could just catch the foam of the crest, racing seaward.

Tai Ching hurled another rock. Glass splintered.

The lodge was twisting, toppling. Tai Ching splashed to the verandah. He lurched against the door, and into the darkness. Carver stumbled, clawed wrist deep into mud. He got to his knees. Half crippled, he made vain efforts to regain his feet.

Furniture toppled. Glass shattered. Lights blazed on. Carver relaxed. All under control—

Or so he thought until the flood crest raced ever nearer. He got



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to his feet, yelling as he lurched along, "Tai Ching! Get out—get out—"

A door slammed. "Chung Li! Chung Li!" Another door slammed. "Brother, wake up—flood—get out—"

Tai Ching knew what he was doing. He knew far better than did Carver.

The lights went out. A wall of water tore the lodge from its foundations, and took it with its escort of driftwood into the current. Midstream, it made for the sea.

IX.

Water, knee deep, pulled at Carver, twisted him, clung to him, until at last he won good footing on the driveway, to fight his way to the road.

"*O mi to fu!*" he gasped. "The three of them—all three—"

Stunned, Carver stood in the ankle deep water of the road. The lodge bobbed like a cork. Its wet shingles mirrored the moonlight. There was not a single fleck of black on the roof. Without hope, Carver had looked for a survivor. The river curved. Rocky snags would tear the lodge to pieces before it reached the sea.

He doubted that the Coast Guard would ever find the three. He hoped that they would not. Homesick Chinamen, homeward bound. Better that way.

Headlights blazed. A jeep splashed to a stop. A gun barrel levelled off. Carver raised his hands. A passenger cried, "Uncle Tao Fa! Earl, it's all right! Oh—what happened to you—"

"I thought you two were in the lodge. I saw the flood crest."

The shotgun went back into its sheath.

Lan Yin, Chung Li, and Earl, the Occidental driver, came toward him.

"So that's what happened! Trying to warn us. We saw the lights," Lan Yin said, as the men crowded up to join her. "We came down—"

"Expected trouble," Earl cut in. "Punks, looting. Hope they were washed down stream. Almost worth a house, just to drown a pack of those rats!"

Lan Yin continued, "Earl's our neighbor. Across, up the hill."

"Jeep road," Earl explained. "Came down to pick them up, they couldn't drive up to join us for drinks. Then this rain—nice mess. Their car's hood deep in water."

Carver said, "House gone—everything gone. Earl, my car's up the

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road, one wheel in the mud. Give me a pull, I can get out, easy. These honeymooners ought to get back home, for some more clothes." He regarded Lan Yin for a moment. The moon was white and full. "I came up here," he said to Earl, "to give them both some news."

The jeep man read the two Chinese faces, and Carver's too. "If it's that way, we can do it that way, no sweat. You better go back by the Coast. No telling what's blocking the road, between here and Gurneville—heck, yes, this jeep's a stump-puller. No problem—crowd in, and I'll show you!"

With little time lost, Carver, Lan Yin and Chung Li got under way. Finally Carver said, "Tai Ching asked me to bring you the Kwan family documents. Also his blessing, and your freedom."

"You did it! How wonderful!"

"I did nothing. It was old-time friendship, the ancient oath. Tai Ching recited the lines. He recited a couple of poems. Something snapped. Cracked. He said it was time for *him* to be liberated, too. He had some fine prospects in Taiwan. Would be leaving at once. Well, he did. Suddenly."

Lan Yin exhaled a long breath, a quavering sigh.

Chung Li said, "Going with Old Custom was better than a fighting contest. Before you take us to my place, let us stop at the temple, to make an incense offering."

"Very good," Carver agreed. "Tai Ching gave me a bottle of wine for the bride to heat. Your stove went down the river, so the one in the temple will have to do."

To have given them the story, and with half or more of his attention on the winding road, would have been a gross impropriety, Carver felt. So he reviewed the details, to fix them. . . .

In the temple, they fired up nine joss sticks. They kowtowed three times. They went into the all-purpose room. Carver got the Mirror of Ko Hung, while Lan Yin was heating the wine.

When she brought the jug, he said, "Before we drink, let us look into the Mirror. I do not think that we will need circle, pentagon, and star. We three, sitting together, will be enough.

"I offer each a hand. We will look into the mirror lands."

"This is a ceremony to thank my absent friend?"

"Yes, and in remembrance of the oath that he remembered and honored. This time, no music, no chanting. Silence will be better."

Silence . . . silence so total that it had force. The sounds of Chinatown were far off, unreal, and could not jar the *psychic* silence which those three had created. It was easy for Carver, as it had never before been, to sit, neither thinking nor not-thinking. His mind was

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like a traveller who, having reached his destination, ceases walking.

From weariness, from let-down, he swayed ever so little. Thus in the mirror he sometimes saw himself, sometimes saw Lan Yin, again, saw Chung Li; for the curvature of the polished metal derived from a geometry which Euclid had never known.

At last, there was a faint misting of the metal. The three faces merged, and became one composite face—deep set, burning eyes, overshadowing brows, a majestic beak of a nose. . . . Tai Ching faced Carver, and surely, Tai Ching was also facing the others . . . The fierce eyes became soft and glowing with affection, with happiness, the majesty faded, and all barriers fell.

Carver had often wondered whether lip reading was possible in Chinese, since meaning depended so much on tones as well as context. And then he recalled, as from ancient times, the funeral music, and the music of the betrothal festival, and the wedding music—this was the mirror of Ko Hung, projecting sight and sound, and who knows what other senses, if trained, would respond?

Tai Ching was speaking—

Lan Yin cried out, wordlessly.

Chung Li spoke a few words. He choked, he spoke again. He bowed three times, that geometrically perfect, right-angle bow, as when one faces the coffin of an Ancestor or another venerable person.

The image blurred, faded. The mirror gleamed, and Carver saw only his own face, until, weaving a little, he saw Chung Li, with tears coursing down his cheeks.

The three regarded each other.

Carver said, "I thought that he might tell you himself. Now you know that he came with me, to take leave of you. Perhaps he did not tell you that he knew the danger far more clearly than I did. That he went in, looking for you. Thinking you might be drinking-drunk, kissing-drunk, honeymoon-drunk. No telling what wild games lovers might play, and he searched—

"Chung Li, you have lost a true friend. Not once, during those moments of searching an empty house, while I was floundering and stumbling, an old man wallowing in deep mud and deep water, did he ever call Lan Yin. To the end, he cried, 'Chung Li—wake up—Brother, wake up!' "

Chung Li bowed. "I am happy, but not amazed."

Lan Yin caught Carver's eye. Her eyes were warm and lovely, and the smile in them crept down to the corners of her mouth, to lurk there. Uncle Tao Fa had buried Tai Ching forever.

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THE SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR
by Erwin S. Strauss

The SF con(vention) season is at its height now. Get out to some social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an addressed, stamped enevlope (SASE) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. The Hot Line is (703) 273-6111. If my machine answers, leave your area code and number CLEARLY, and I'll call you back. When writing cons, enclose an SASE. When calling them, give your name and reason for calling right away. No charge to list your con. Look for me at cons as Filthy Pierre.

EmpiriCon. For info, write: **Box 682, Church St. Sta., New York NY 10008.** Or phone: **(212) 934-3707** (10 AM to 10 PM only, not collect). Con will be held in: New York NY (if location omitted, same as in address) on: 3-6 Jul., 1980. Guests will include: I*S*A*A*C A*S*I*M*O*V. After a year's hiatus, the EmpiriCon strikes back. Prince George Hotel.

Archon, (314) 727-8607. St. Louis MO, 11-13 Jul. Robert Bloch, W. A. (Bob) Tucker, Ed Bryant.

OKon, Box 4229, Tulsa OK 74104. 18-20 Jul. A. D. Foster, Gordon Dickson, Jack Williamson, Robert Asprin, C. J. Cherryh, R. A. Lafferty, Lee Killough, Shelby Bush, M. K. Jackson.

SpaceCon, c/o Bowers, 2468 Harrison Ave., Cincinnati OH 45211. 18-20 Jul.

AutoClave, c/o Drutowski, 2412 Galpin, Royal Oak MI 48068. Detroit MI, 25-27 Jul. Jeanne Gomoll, Dan Steffan, Ted (Heavy Metal) White. Greektown banquet outdoor concert/party.

Space: 1999 Con, 86 1st, New London OH 44851. Columbus OH, 25-27 Jul. For the show's fans.

ParaCon, c/o Casto, 425 Waupelani Dr. #24, State College PA 16801. 1-3 Aug. C. L. Grant, Freas.

RiverCon, Box 8251, Louisville KY 40208. 1-3 Aug. Zelazny, DiFate. Sunday riverboat ride.

AugusTrek, Box 124, Fair Lawn NJ 07410. Washington DC, 1-3 Aug. Phone call to Roddenberry, amateur hour. The successor to August Party, that most fannish of Star Trek cons.

BaerCon, c/o Incos e. V., Golzstr. 35, D-1000 West Berlin 30. 15-17 Aug. German national con.

MichiCon, 1916 Cadillac, Flint MI 48504. (313) 234-4062. 15-17 Aug. Delany, Sturgeon, Boris.

SwanCon, Box 225, Wembley 6014 Western Australia. Perth, Australia, 15-18 Aug. Anne McCaffrey. The Australian national con. Not to be confused with SwannCon in the U.S.

BuboniCon, c/o ASFS, 429 Graceland SE, Albuquerque NM 87108. 22-24 Aug. C. J. Cherryh.

NorEasCon II, Box 46, MIT PO, Boston MA 02139. 29 Aug.-1 Sep. Damon Knight, Kate Wilhelm, Pelz, Silverberg. The 1980 WorldCon. Join by July 15 for $30 and save $15. See you there.

BeneluxCon, c/o Vernon Brown, U. of Aston, Dept. of Pharmacy, Gosta Green, Birmingham B4 74E, UK. Ghent, Belgium 5-8 Sep. The 7th annual edition of this major European con.

MosCon, c/o Finkbiner, Box 9141, Moscow ID 83843. 12-14 Sep. George Barr, Frank Denton.

RoVaCon, Box 117, Salem VA 24153. (703) 389-9400. Roanoke VA, 10-11 Oct. Pohl, Freas.

OtherCon, Knudson, Box 3933, Aggieland Sta. TX 77844. College Sta TX, 12-14 Sep., 1980.

WesterCon 34, Box 161719, Sacramento CA 95816. Held over the July 4th weekend in 1981.

Denvention II, Box 11545, Denver CO 80211. 3-7 Sep., 1981. C. L. Moore, Clifford Simak, R. Hevelin, Ed Bryant. The 1981 WorldCon. It's not too early to start planning vacations.

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LETTERS

Your letters are of great help to us, not only in telling us what you think we're doing right, or wrong, or too much of, or not enough of, but also in the very important matter of newsstand distribution: where are we reaching newsstands? Where are we not that we should be? Do keep writing!

Letters to the editor should be addressed to the magazine at Box 13116, Philadelphia PA 19101; this is the same address for submitting manuscripts (but please — not until you have sent us a stamped, self-addressed envelope so that we can send you our folder on what we're looking for in story manuscripts). Subscription matters go to Box 2650, Greenwich CT 06836. Other matters for the publisher's staff, such as advertising, bulk orders, and the like should be directed to us at 380 Lexington Ave., New York NY 10017

—George H. Scithers

Dear Sirs:

Okay, we'll bite. My husband and I each got an idea for a story and are respectfully submitting a request for story needs and format. Since he is a software designer and I am a former teacher of German, English, and SF, our stories will be worlds apart (that sounds like a possible title . . .).

As science fiction fiends for a great part of our lives, we have thoroughly enjoyed your magazine: we usually fight over it when it comes. As a matter of fact, I managed to conceal and savor the Feb. issue for two days before my husband caught me working "Title Find." He was outraged, because I had lied point blank when he had asked me if it had arrived. Now he's threatening to get his own subscription.

The article in the Feb. issue by Gunn, "On the Tinsel Screen: S.F. & the Movies," was excellent. A yearly review of the multitude of SF movies that are made might be a good idea. An occasional article of a biographical nature concerning some of the great figures in SF literature might be stimulating as well. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Sharon Webb. We loved her Bull Run stories, and her latest, "Variations . . . ", shows how well she is developing as a writer.

Thank you all for keeping us sane!

Susan E. Crooks
Marietta GA

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For heaven's sake, don't risk your family. A second subscription is well worth it if it will keep the two of you in happy togetherness.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers:

If I were handed the assignment of finding a new writer who combined the evocative power of Frank Herbert, the clever wit and vibrancy of Spider Robinson, the innovation of Harlan Ellison, and the care and control of Isaac Asimov, I would consider the task to be impossible. You, esteemed sir, have turned this feat neatly with the publication of two stories by Somtow Sucharitkul.

Mr. Sucharitkul is, in my opinion, the best new writer to appear in quite a few years—by an order of magnitude. I do not use these terms lightly! I forgive you those horrid Momus and Horny Hake stories and the awful Feghoots. Thank you for publishing Somtow Sucharitkul. Let us have more of his work, please. Long may he write!

Faithfully,

Jay W. Lounsbury
Forestville MD

P.S. What a vast improvement Barry Longyear's most recent two or three stories (e.g., "Project Fear") have been over his tired and boring Momus stories. I am amazed at the praise which the latter have received in your Letters Columm. I read them all, but with hopes diminished with each passing page. The later stories from Mr. Longyear show real depth, talent, and versatility.

I can't help but consider Somtow Sucharitkul's growing popularity a triumph of quality over spelling.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers:

What a delight it was to read "Furlough" in the November 1979 issue of *IA'sfm* In fact, the whole issue was particularly outstanding (as opposed the usual "outstanding"). However, "Furlough" really moved me.

Just because one writes science fiction stories does not excuse the all too prevalent emphasis on the mechanical, rather than the emotional, nature of human beings, giants or not.

Perhaps you should print a warning at the beginning of stories

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such as this one: it was very embarrassing to be caught blubbering on the Seventh Avenue IRT! And people who looked at the magazine cover were even more nonplussed!

I might admit here that it was the nicest cry I've had in awhile. Keep up the good work! Even though I work all day and attend school all night, I struggle to keep up with this magazine. I've just been given even more incentive to do so.

Kudos to all in that issue, especially Skip Wall!

Sincerely,

Carol Ann Schachter
New York NY

Don't be embarrassed. A soft and sentimental heart is a woman's crowning glory. It's only the soft sentimentality that makes it possible for them to endure men. And without you, where would we men be?

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers and Dr. Asimov,

I'm not sure if you'll print this letter in your Letters to the Editor, but I hope you do!

Usually, your magazine is 192 pages in length, and you will clarify that on the cover with a **192 PAGES** in the upper right corner. Yet, sometimes you will *not* have 192 pages (there is nothing on your cover this time) and you only have 178 pages. We, the readers, are still paying $1.25 for your magazine, how come sometimes 192 pages and sometimes 178? Why this 14-page difference? I'm sure you can fit in another short story or some more letters (not advertisements, please!) in that space. I'm not so sure if any other readers are bothered by this, but why can't ALL of the issues be 192 pages????

Yours in confusion,

Michael A. Hemmingson
1631 Walbollen Street
Spring Valley CA 92077

If you knew what was happening to the price of paper you'd stop being puzzled. It's either down with pages or up with price (or, most likely, both). If you think we like it, you have never been wronger in your life.

—Isaac Asimov

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Dear Doctor Asimov:

Nobody understands. I seem to be the only person who *hates* the Momus stories with a *passion*. Honestly, I think the Ninth Quadrant should nuke the stinkin' little mudball, and put an end to those terrible stories. On the other hand, the rest of *IA'sfm* is one of the finer points of life.

In reflection on the February 1980 issue, the magazine was very good overall. "Mascot" was trite, but was more than made up for by "The God and his Man." I enjoyed "Caduceus," "Of Days Gone By," and "A Little Incorrectness." Martin Gardner's puzzle was a slight bit of a disappointment, as it was too simple. By the by, the best (by far) story so far has been "Enemy Mine."

I have grown fond of *IA'sfm* and the smiling visage of the Good Doctor (complete with sideburns) on the cover. Have you ever considered publishing a sister magazine along the lines of *Isaac Asimov's Science Magazine*? I am positive that it would draw a large readership (myself included). Thank you for your time and for putting out such a fine magazine.

Sincerely,

John Koger
19806 Needles St.
Chatsworth CA 91311

A letter like yours will teach Barry that life is real, life is earnest. Every writer must learn the unsettling news that not everyone likes him. I had to, and if I had to, Barry's going to have to, too.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers,

Having been turned off by the consistently poor stories appearing in some of the other SF magazines (which shall remain nameless), I finally turned to *IA'sfm* having decided it couldn't posibly be any worse than what I had been wading through. I was beginning to think that the art of short-story writing was dead. Congratulations! Your magazine is fantastic; just the right sprinkling of humor throughout and never a bad story. In fact there's seldom a story that I would consider even mediocre.

You can't imagine my joy when I found that several of the stories I was enjoying were also the author's first sale. Writing has been a hobby of mine for about nine years since I was twelve, even though, until now I had almost no hope of ever getting anything published.

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I was surprised by the encouragement you offer people like myself when most of the other SF magazines seemed almost hostile to us, considering us a nuisance. I'm glad someone has finally recognized us as the writers of the future, a vast pool of untapped talent just waiting for somebody to give us our chance. Keep up the good work and we'll keep on reading and, of course, writing.

Please send me a copy of your needs and manuscript format so I can take my shot at appearing in the pages of your high quality publication. SASE is enclosed.

Sincerely,

Kevin L. Osborn

In all honesty, I don't think any of the magazines are hostile to beginners. We all want to discover new talent. It's just that between my genial madness and George's sober optimism and Shawna's sweet sentimentality, we take more chances perhaps.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear George:

I'm quite delighted to see that *IA'sfm* hasn't been averse to using SF poetry from time to time. Based on my own experiences and observations, it appears that poetry in the science fiction and fantasy genres is becoming a viable sub-genre in itself. As a member of the Science Fiction Poetry Association, in which the reigning practitioners of speculative poetry discuss, debate, pontificate, and otherwise proselytize about their chosen art form, I'd like to thank you for offering a highly visible forum for SF poets. Perhaps the Good Doctor could briefly discuss the SFPA in a future editorial. We need the publicity!

I'm sending along a brief, light-hearted poem that feels like it wouldn't be out of place in your magazine. Hope you like it!

All the best,

Keith A. Daniels
Pensacola FL

An editorial on SF poetry might be in order, if I knew more about poetry than I do. Let me try to get my thoughts in order and we'll see.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Sirs:

When I was living in Flagstaff, once a week I would raid the news

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stand for my favorite magazines. And since I found the SF magazines on the porno rack, I have since leaped to the conclusion that Dr Asimov has his name on a (heh, heh, heh) hard core magazine.

Now that I have that bit of nonsense out of the way, if you will box up one of your writer's requirements and send it to me, I'll be glad to get it off your hands. I hope the SASE is not too mangled to use! [*It was fine.*]

In the February '80 issue the story I liked best was "Mascot." I don't know if it was intended to be funny but I laughed so hard the cats were looking at me like I was crazy. I enjoyed it immensely!

More seriously: This is something I've been thinking about for some time; maybe Dr Asimov could devote a paragraph or two to explain it to anybody who's interested: As many people have observed, computers have become playtoys for children—they talk, they teach, they win games from poor fools like me with ridiculous ease. I've heard of diagrams for wiring a house to almost literally take care of itself.

In addition to this, gadgets for cars have gotten to the point where I don't recognise half the instruments on the dash anymore. (Good Ford, lighting keyholes?!) I know of at least one such gadget that keeps the engine in tune and warns the driver when something goes wrong. Autopilots and cruise control are getting so elaborate the car will almost drive itself. I don't think it will be much longer before they will drive themselves.

Granted such a vehicle would be available only to the very rich. But even now I can imagine all the screaming about irresponsible automobiles running over little children. Certainly the autopilots will have to have special programming. Here's the bombshell: Do you think the Laws of Robotics would apply in such a situation?

Ann Stratton
202 5th Street
Safford AZ 85546

PS: I have heard Dr Asimov described as a "delightfully mad scientist." Gee—are you really?

You bet the laws of robotics will apply. And as for myself—well, I'm a little mad and a lot delightful.

—Isaac Asimov

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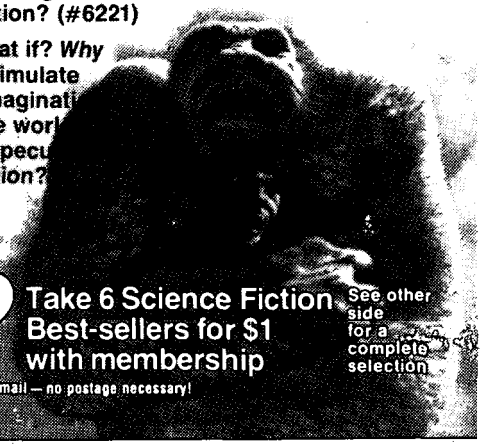

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